

Australians at War Film Archive

Elizabeth Marchant - Transcript of interview

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<http://australiansatwarfilmarchive.unsw.edu.au/archive/959>

Tape 1

00:38 **It'd be great if you could take us back to your childhood.**

When I was born?

Yes.

I was born in a small village called Batesford, which is outside Geelong. My father was the Presbyterian minister there. That was the very last parish that he had

01:00 before he started doing academic work. He had a very interesting course. After he'd finished at Ormond College, he was a very brilliant student with Greek and classics and that sort of thing, he had about ten years at university so he thought he'd like to have a big break away from bookwork so he went up to the outback

01:30 and was up in the outback for about four years doing missionary work there with camels and horses, they didn't have planes and that sort of thing there. Then in 1911 he wanted to come down to South Australia to marry my mother so he had to choose someone who would take over from him. He chose his best friend from

02:00 Ormond College days called John Flynn. It was John Flynn who started the Flying Doctor Service. He was a great friend of ours, forever. However, I lived in Batesford until I was three then my father was asked to go up to Melbourne to be principal of the St Andrew's Theological College, which is

02:30 in Carlton, Rathdowne Street, Carlton. Then I lived there until I was sixteen.

Had your father or any of your relatives been involved in the Great War?

Yes. A lot of them. It's a big family that he came from but his father had died and three of them went to

03:00 the Great War. Uncle Dick, he was in Gallipoli and Uncle Cecil was in France and Uncle Tom was also in France. Uncle Dick was very badly wounded in Gallipoli and he had the whole of his lower jaw shot away. Had a horrid scar, they patched him up as well as they could.

03:30 It was many years after my father and Jack McFee who was head of Repatriation [Commission], again he had been a chaplain right through the war and then after that he was the head of repatriation [Repatriation] for Victoria and they arranged for Uncle Dick to have a graft and he got a new jaw bone made from his own shin bone. It made such a difference from that, a whole personality

04:00 change. Then Uncle Cec, he lost his leg, his foot. That was in France. He ended up as head of repatriation for Tasmania. Uncle Tom was badly gassed but he just did normal work. The other brother, he did not go to war, he did

04:30 a lot of work during the war, Red Cross and that sort of thing, but he was the government astronomer and when it came to building the Shrine [of Remembrance] he had to work out this eye of light, where the light shone on the stone at the eleventh [hour] of the eleventh [day] of the eleventh [month], had to do the calculations of that. We were all very, very involved

05:00 with World War I.

What can you remember, Elizabeth, of your childhood, what was your earliest memory?

I used to love Anzac Day. I had a lovely childhood. We had four girls and one boy and we were living at Rathdowne Street, Carlton. We all went to PLC [Presbyterian Ladies' College], which in those days

05:30 was in Victoria Parade, which is where the Dallas Brooks Hall is now. We used to walk through the gardens and go to school there. My brother would go further on, get the tram down to Scotch College. Very happy life.

What's PLC?

The Presbyterian Ladies College, the only school I went to. Now it's in Burwood.

06:00 Had lots of sport, we had our own tennis court. My father was very keen on sport.

When did the family move from Geelong to Carlton?

1924. I was only three then and then we had, we didn't start school until we were six so I had lots of

06:30 quite nice times before I had to go back to school.

Can you tell me a little bit about your brothers and sisters?

They were all happy people. My eldest sister she went straight on to university and was a librarian. My sister Mary, the next one, she was doing Red Cross work

07:00 during the war. My brother did a medical course and he was in the army as a medical doctor. My sister Anne, she was teaching. She used to do a lot of extra work with the munitions in the school holidays. Then I went into the nursing career at the Alfred Hospital.

07:30 My happiest days there were Anzac Day. That's before the Shrine had been built. They used to have the service in the Exhibition Gardens in the big building there, which is directly opposite where we lived. So the uncles would march and then they'd all come straight over to our house. Much more fun than Christmas. Mother would have a huge dinner for them and then we'd

08:00 hear their stories and they'd let us wear their medals. It was that sort of thing. I just was always keen on that sort of thing. Then I'd hear all these stories, wonderful stories and then after dinner they'd sit round the piano and sing their songs. My father was rather tone deaf and a lot of their wartime songs were

08:30 old hymn tunes and my father would say, "It's lovely to hear the boys sing the hymns," but of course he couldn't hear the words they were singing, 'humpty dumpty', you know, with the rude words, it was fun, fun days.

So your uncles actually spoke quite freely about their wartime?

Yes, oh, the fun things they would tell us.

09:00 **Do you remember some of those hymns and how they actually changed the lyrical content?**

Yes. 'The church is one foundation', they would sing, "We are the ragtime army, the A N Z A C." I really can't remember.

09:30 I remember, "When we go to Berlin, we'll say to Bob, my God, what a rotten lot, the A N Z A C." I can't remember it in detail.

Do you remember much more about how Anzac Day was commemorated, what happened at Exhibition Park?

No we didn't go in to that.

10:00 They'd have a parade and then they'd have a service, then they came over to see us, yes; the uncles and their friends. Much more fun than Christmas Day. They'd tell us lovely stories.

What else do you remember of your childhood? What were the sorts of games that young girls played in those days?

10:30 At school?

Be it at school or at home.

I was very keen on sport and I used to play tennis, baseball, basketball and athletics. We had a very small lawn there for big sports. We had about four tennis courts at PLC.

11:00 Now they've all got so much. There were only about six hundred pupils there. Baseball, we'd have to play with a softball round the school, then we'd go out to Glenferrie Oval for a hard baseball and a Doctor Inglis who had been, I gather, a very good baseball player used to come in and coach us.

11:30 Then we'd play against the other girls, the Hermitage and Melbourne Grammar School and MLC [Methodist Ladies' College] and Cath's [St Catherine's Girls' School]. At home, my father was a very, very busy person with all his lectures and that sort of thing. After dinner, he always gave half an hour to the children.

12:00 In the wintertime we played ping pong. We had a lovely big table and played table tennis. In the summertime, French cricket in the garden. He always had his half hour with us.

What was your mother like?

She was lovely, very good sense of humour. She was brought up in

- 12:30 South Australia. Her grandfather came out in 1836, he was a captain of a ship and it was called the Golden Grove. He was coming out from the Orkney Islands and I think he had done several trips from Scotland out here and then he realized that Australia was a rather good place
- 13:00 to go to. Eventually he came back to Australia with his wife and a son and a daughter and then they settled. He called his estate Golden Grove, which was the name of the same last ship that he had commanded. The whole estate was Golden Grove but now it's all been divided and in the thirties I think
- 13:30 the family sold it and now the whole of that area is a huge estate called Golden Grove, they took his name. They had grapes and sheep and we used to go over to see Granny about every two years or so in the steam train. We'd put on our old clothes and then, because there'd
- 14:00 be all the soot from the steam trains. We didn't have bathrooms and that sort of thing then. She had a big bag with wet washers and that and new clothes. So we had our old clothes until we got to Murray Bridge and then we were put into our nice new clothes and the wet washers getting all the soot out of our faces and then we
- 14:30 were arranged. We had to change gauge at Murray Bridge, the same train didn't go right through then, and then we'd arrive in South Australia very, very smart though we'd had a lot of fun just being in our old sooty clothes. Yes, it was fun. Then we'd go to Golden Grove. It was lovely there, had these lovely vineyards and big house. The house is still there; it's National Trust.

15:00 Happy times.

You said your father was able to devote that time every day to the children.

Yes he did.

How was that time spent?

That's when we used to play ping-pong or French cricket or something like that, then at night he would always check on our homework, make certain that was all right.

- 15:30 He had a lot of his meals with the students. It wasn't sort of like a nine to five job. Had a lot of night classes. He always made certain he had time for the children. Another thing he would do was on Saturday and Sundays he'd take us for lovely walks around Melbourne, showing what happened here,
- 16:00 where Batman had landed, the history of Melbourne. We walked everywhere. We didn't have a car; we didn't need it because we could walk down to the city in about ten minutes. His brother, who was at the observatory, we'd walk right down from Victoria Street and Rathdowne Street, walk right down there,
- 16:30 Swanson Street and St Kilda Road to the observatory. I think that's why we're all so fit now, good food and lots of exercise and the walk for one hour across to, the one mile to school every day and on the way back too and it has kept us going.

17:00 **I must take note of that.**

Also, this house we lived in had this big verandah on the front and we had the bedrooms right in the front then like French windows but on the front verandah we had little black iron beds right across the front there and we'd sleep outside. You couldn't do that in Carlton now, could you? Then you just

17:30 hop over into your bedroom after. So that fresh air and the good walk to school, healthy, good food.

What was Melbourne like in those days?

Quiet. As the Americans used to say, 'dead', and beautifully laid out. It was very quiet. Very religious. I think the churches ran Melbourne then.

- 18:00 It was a quiet, stately thing. I think it was a very cultural centre. We used to have these wonderful concerts in the Melbourne Town Hall. Of course the thing is, you would have people coming over from England or Europe. You'd definitely go to see these people, the pianists
- 18:30 or singers, because you'd probably never see them again. My parents were very good like that, they'd always take us to these lovely concerts. You'd have season tickets for the symphony concerts at the Melbourne Town Hall. That's where all the concerts were. You'd have Richard Tauber and Lawrence Tibbett.
- 19:00 Then of course when it came to that stage, the Viennese boys [Vienna Boys' Choir], they were here when war broke out giving a concert tour and they got as far as Perth when war broke out and they couldn't go back to Vienna and so the Roman Catholic Cardinal here, Mannix, he asked them all to
- 19:30 come back to Melbourne and different families would take them to live with them and they went to Christian Brothers, which is right next door to St Pat's [St Patrick's] Cathedral, Albert Street, and they used to have them there singing in St Pat's. A lot of people go to church there to hear the Viennese

boys. The other people

20:00 who were caught up at the same time was Yehudi Menuhin and his sister Hephzibah. They lived here right through the war because they couldn't get back. They married the Nicholas brother and sister, Aspro people [Nicholas family developed Aspro brand of aspirin tablets]. They ended up divorced eventually, but they were looked after by the Aspro people.

20:30 **You said that obviously the church was a driving force at the time, your father obviously working at the theological college. To what extent was your upbringing a religious one?**

Well, I went to a church school and we'd have assembly every morning and every Friday we had religious education.

21:00 At home we used to have, we used to go to the church at eleven o'clock and Sunday school at three. We didn't have to go to the seven o'clock service. We could if we wanted to but we didn't have to. You read good books. You weren't supposed to do any sewing or anything like that except if you were sewing for others.

21:30 It was strict but the church we went to was right on the corner of Rathdowne Street and Queensberry Street. It's now - it was taken down. It was built for the early Scottish people who came and it had their services in Gaelic.

22:00 It was built for eleven hundred people, beautiful building; however in the end, when we were there, about ten or twenty or thirty people, it was a very, very small congregation. Once a year, they'd have a special service in Gaelic to get all the old people to come in. We thought that was good for a laugh. It sounded like cats wailing, getting all these Gaelic people.

22:30 Then that was pulled down and rebuilt in a much smaller way in Gardiner on the corner of Burke Road and Malvern Road. It's still there. Lovely grounds there and our back gate went into the churchyard and so we had lots of ground in our house and all the use of the church grounds too.

23:00 We could run free; it was lovely.

What do you recall, Elizabeth, of your school days, the sort of subjects you were doing and what you were interested in at that time?

I was interested in sport. I wasn't a very good student. The trouble was the other three had been there and they were clever. I suppose they thought I'd be the same but I wasn't really.

23:30 I played too much. I enjoyed history of art and that sort of thing. I loved biological science. I went, attended, but there wasn't, they didn't really make you work. It was a very, very free time I thought.

24:00 I had lovely friends.

What sort of plans would your parents, for example, have of a daughter at that stage? What would they expect? I mean, if you weren't doing well at school and you were into sports, was that something that was discouraged?

No, my father was very keen on sport. The others did very well at school but I think I wasted my time really, academically.

24:30 I learnt enough to get by. I enjoyed it. I did my Leaving, Matric [Matriculation] with effort.

You were saying earlier, you were talking about Anzac Day and your uncles coming over and the tradition of being involved, was that something that you felt you wanted to do your part as well, even from an early age?

25:00 Yes I did. Very much God, King and country, very patriotic.

What was patriotism in those days, was it an allegiance to Australia?

People if they were having a trip to England would say, "We're going home," they were very keen on England. All our school uniforms were made in England or Scotland,

25:30 ties and everything. If it was British, it was good. People were very loyal then.

I guess 1929, 1930 the Depression had begun and you were a young girl of seven or eight or so, what do you recall of that period and the way that families struggled?

26:00 My family didn't struggle; they still had four children at PLC and one at Scotch. My father used to help where he could for people who needed help. We had a lot of beggars coming round. We'd always give them food or if they really needed some money they'd have to do some work to get some money, give them more pride.

26:30 Then he had these tickets from the Salvation Army home. If they didn't have a home to go to, then they could go and bed down there, then they'd send the bills back to my father at the end of the month. The drawer in his study in his desk all sort of brummy watches and rings and things like that, like a

pawnbrokers. You know, "Could you give me something on this?" "Yes," and he'd give them a few bob.

27:00 There was so many of these people who'd go to the cheap wine shops or the metho [methylated spirits] drinkers and they'd come round for money but he wouldn't give them to spend on the wine or the metho.

What would he do in those instances?

He'd tell them, if they'd like to do some gardening

27:30 or chop wood, we had a huge woodshed out the back. My Uncle Dick was right up in the Mallee, would send us down these huge Mallee roots to chop. He'd often ask them to chop those up. The genuine ones would want to do that and have more pride to get their money but the old methos [methylated spirits addicts] they'd go on their way

28:00 and probably ask someone else. It was a very safe place then. These days I wouldn't walk through the Exhibition Gardens or the Carlton Gardens as they call it now. We had to walk straight through the main path there then to Victoria Parade and on to school. It was safe. You never thought you'd be mugged or anything like that.

28:30 **What other signs of that suffering did you see round town?**

Well, you saw a lot of people playing musical instruments. There was one person who was a lawyer, the son of one of my parent's friends. He had a good law degree but he was also a very good violinist and he was playing his violin for money, he couldn't get a job. I don't know why the Depression started.

29:00 I think there were a lot of the wartime people, World War I, had never really got back into proper employment. I don't know what caused it. It was an unhappy time but as a family, I suppose it didn't affect us so very much but we were there to help when we could.

29:30 **You were saying earlier off camera about the piper.**

Oh yes, there was a Scotsman who came round with full highland rig and his pipes and said to Mother, "Could I play my pipes and get a little bit of money?" and Mother said, "I've never ever heard of a Scotsman playing his bagpipes for money but I'd love to hear you

30:00 play that," she was very Scottish, "but I can give you a good lunch, would that do." So for months he used to come round at lunchtime and Mother had her own personal piper who'd go round the garden playing that and then he'd have his lovely proper lunch. A lot of them, she had a lot of soup and things for others who wanted that.

30:30 A huge stockpot on the open range in the kitchen.

What was a typical meal at that time?

For us?

Your mother, yeah, what would she be cooking?

Oh, she didn't cook; we had a good staff. They also did some cooking for the students so we had a good staff, a cook

31:00 and a housemaid and a gardener, so we were very well looked after. We'd have soup and you'd have a roast. I think with the staff, the cook had a half day off on Wednesday and half day on Sunday. We'd all go to church on Sunday morning,

31:30 the cook wouldn't be at church, the cook would cook us a lovely roast dinner for when we got back and then after we were looked after then had a half day off. That was the way things were done then. The other one, in the thirties we had a spy. We didn't know that till well after. There were a lot of German

32:00 people came out in the thirties looking for employment but I gather it was Hitler sending them out to 'case the joint', you know. So this Hassell, she was a lovely person and a very good cook and looked after us so well. I remember Mother thought she was very extravagant with lots of butter and that sort of thing. She was a dear.

32:30 When she had her appendix, my parents sent her to St Andrew's Hospital and looked after her. It was a caring community. However, when they had that centenary air race from London across to Melbourne, that was Melbourne's centenary, and Bertram, who was the German pilot came down at the north of Australia around Darwin

33:00 and it turned out later that he had come down purposely to have a look at the north. Hassell used to always go across to the Lutheran church every Sunday evening and when she told me that Bertram this German pilot who'd been in the air race was going to talk at that church I pestered my parents, "I want to

33:30 go with Phyllis to go to see Bertram." At any rate, I did go. He spoke and then after the service they

said, "Will all the young people come into the church hall after." I had to sit in the cold old church, this was in East Melbourne, the Lutheran church, and he spoke to them, a bit of a spy gang there.

34:00 Then, we didn't know, after a few years she went back to Germany. When they had this escape from Cowra, I think, from the people who were interned there, they said one person who'd escaped was Johan Hassell and they said that he and his sister Phyllis had been

34:30 spying in Melbourne pre-war in the thirties. Well, we didn't know but we'd been harbouring a spy for a few years and looking after her very well. She looked after us well.

What would that spying have entailed, do you know?

Well, I don't know, I don't know what they were doing. Just seeing what's happening. I gather Bertram, this pilot,

35:00 he was trying to have a good look at the coastline, that's why he came down there. I remember the cook from the Windsor Hotel, Zimmerman, and he used to make my birthday cakes, another spy, cake that was lovely. Had a lovely time in the war.

35:30 **Tell me about the staff there and what relations were like between the family and the staff?**

We looked after them well and they looked after us well. We made our own beds. We did after dinner; we washed the cutlery.

Because they were busy spying, weren't they?

36:00 On Sunday, they were off duty; that was fun, we'd have fruit salad and cold meats and salads and things, we'd get that. I think we were a bit spoilt, a different type of life. I'm very useful now. I didn't realize until I was married how

36:30 undomesticated I was; first that life with my parents and then going to the Alfred Hospital where everything was done for you. You did lots with the patients but your food and that sort of thing. Then into the air force, everything done for you, and I was very well looked after.

37:00 I'd never run a house as such. I picked it up very quickly. Then of course, lived in Singapore and Ceylon and those places, lots of servants there too. When my husband retired, I got back to basics. Different way of life.

What was your mother's life like? She sounds very atypical for that time,

37:30 **how would she busy herself during the day?**

On a lot of church committees, the Presbyterian Missionary Union, also looking after us. She was always there to see us off, was always there to welcome us back.

38:00 She had a beautiful voice. She had her own singing lessons. She was also very keen on handwork. She was always a busy person.

It was a very musical family as well?

She was. We all learned the piano and I learned the violin until my brother broke it: didn't like the squeaky noise.

38:30 We had lots of music, yes.

During that time, during the thirties, how much information were you getting from Europe, from the rest of the world? What sense did you have that trouble was brewing?

One of my cousins who'd had a trip over to

39:00 England, she was looking after one of the old aunts in Scotland as a companion, then she came back. She was from Western Australia and she came back to Australia and she was staying with us for a while. She had come back on a ship with a lot of these Jewish, German Jews who were escaping.

39:30 She had met a lot of these people. She brought some of these people to our house with these stories of being persecuted. That was rather fun because one of them had been a very good pianist, his name was

40:00 Smit, I think it was. He used to accompany Tauber in Germany with the piano. There was another person, I can't remember all these names now and he had sung with the Viennese Opera Company. Mother had a very nice piano, I think it was a present for when she was first married, she was very keen on music. Mother said to them, "Well, you can come to my house."

40:30 We used to have these lovely concerts with these people with the piano and practicing their music, their singing. I've had a different life.

Different from anything we've heard from that period, that's for sure.

Tape 2

00:34 **Elizabeth, can you tell us about holidays and what the family would do on holidays?**

Often we'd go across to South Australia to see Mother's people and other times we'd sometimes go to Queenscliff and then other times we'd go to Brighton where Jack McFee, who was head of repat, he would move to his brother's house in the country,

01:00 his brother would come to our house in the city and we'd sort of rotate houses, which was really tremendous fun. One Christmas holidays there, I gather was a very good year for berries and Mother thought, "Oh, we'd better come back earlier to make all the berry fruit with the jam," and we had this cook who was going to look after the house

01:30 for us and when she arrived to make the jam and make certain everything was all right, she found that the cook was wearing her dresses and she and her boyfriend were sleeping in mother and daddy's bed and she wasn't very happy about that. They had just taken over her bedroom. I gather he was a criminal on the run.

02:00 Life was never dull at St Andrew's.

How did your mother deal with that?

I wasn't there, I'm sure she dealt with that very quickly.

During your schooling, what sort of vocational aspirations did you have, if any?

02:30 I always said I wanted to be a nurse. I didn't alter from that. Then of course when I left school and I still had to wait for my call-up for the Alfred Hospital and the war was on then so everyone was manpowered, you had to do something. So I went down to the Commonwealth Aircraft

03:00 Corporation in Fishermans Bend making training planes, the Wirraways, and another girl from school and I were working there and another lad from Melbourne Grammar. We worked so hard, we were doing all the what was called cost accounting. I was good with maths. Working out these big pay sheets and job sheets and things. They could work out what each

03:30 nut and bolt and that sort of thing was costing. I think it was called, I don't know, it was all punch card sort of thing. Until I was called up to go to the Alfred, I did that. It was fun and you felt you were doing something for the war effort. Again there,

04:00 a test pilot there turned out to be a German spy, Bosswalker his name was.

That's while you were there?

Yes. Bosswalker, the test pilot.

I didn't realize any of this, that's interesting.

04:30 **Do you remember when war was declared; do you remember where you were?**

Yes. I remember the news came through on the radio. I remember Mother saying, "Oh, you poor girls, how sad," because she'd been through World War I. I thought, "How exciting. What's happening?"

05:00 Was it Chamberlain who gave the news and he had this fairly blue, you just wondered what's going to happen next.

And your sisters and brother, what was their take? Was there a sense that we all have to pull together and do our bit?

05:30 Oh yes. Everyone did something. If you were in the forces you helped in, they just helped where they could. There were canteens for the troops, they'd help in the canteens. Knit,

06:00 did lots of knitting. Everyone was busy. Also on every Friday they'd always have a special big parade in the city. They'd have spinning jennies, you know, with the lucky numbers, giving money for the comfort fund to help the troops. There was always something like that on a Friday.

06:30 **Can I ask Elizabeth why nursing appealed to you so?**

I was a caring person. I always wanted to be a nurse. Actually, my mother did too but she got married instead. One of her other sisters, the one I was called after, she trained at the Adelaide Hospital. I just always

07:00 wanted to be a nurse. I've always been a very practical sort of person. That's what I wanted to do and I was so right, I enjoyed it.

So when war was declared, was it a matter of you enlisting, signing up, or did Manpower make the call?

No, I had put my name down to go to the Alfred Hospital but you had to wait

07:30 until you were called. They used to come in blocks of twenty in the preliminary training school before you went on to the wards. They had, every two months they'd have another twenty and you had to wait your turn there. You always had to with the war on, you had to do something, you were manpowered.

08:00 The thing is to get a job for yourself instead of being manpowered to do it so you can easily get out if you want to move on. So I was doing this work at Commonwealth Aircraft Corporation when I got my call-up to go to the Alfred. In those days you had to

08:30 buy all your own uniform and your shoes, quite an expensive thing. Then you got five bob [shillings] a week when you were training but that went a long way. You had lots of fun on five bob. We were all in the same boat.

By this stage you were late teens, eighteen, nineteen?

Eighteen, you had to be eighteen to

09:00 start your training.

Were boys a factor in your life at that time?

They were all in the Middle East, all your brother's friends and the ones who, they were in the Middle East, well away.

Before that, before the war was there much socializing?

We used to go to

09:30 bridge parties, yes, but it was a quiet sort of life. We used to have my brother's friends would come and stay. There was some church dances. I don't know. There wasn't a very mad social life really.

10:00 People would have little dance parties in their own homes.

Can you tell us about the Alfred and the training that you received there?

The discipline. The matron there was Matron Grace Wilson. She'd been a matron in World War I and eventually she was called back to World War II but when I first went there she was the matron at

10:30 the Alfred. We used to have matron's lectures about the history of the Alfred and about Florence Nightingale and Edith Cavell and all the famous nurses. Also the etiquette, how you were so polite to the people ahead of you.

11:00 If you'd had, say, a cough or you were off one day, you'd have to stay in back for the other people to walk through the door before you, it was all very regimented. You had to get in your right pecking order. Very polite to doctors, very polite to the students. If the matron came to the ward, you had to put your cuffs on,

11:30 stand hands behind your back. It was very, very strict discipline. The matron used to come round every day to see every single patient, which they don't now. The patient had to sit to attention. It was very, very strict.

12:00 We had to be in bed by half past ten and the night sister would come round to make certain we were in bed at half past ten. She would always come back at two o'clock to make certain we were still in bed, like we'd scarper [abscond]. If you were on night duty, three months at a time you got night duty, they had these big iron doors where the night staff slept.

12:30 We'd come off duty at seven and we had to be in bed by half past eight. Sometimes we'd have a game of tennis at the courts at the Alfred or something like that but we had to be in bed and we weren't allowed out again until four o'clock and they'd come and open the big doors - except if you had a lecture, then you'd have to get up, go to

13:00 the lecture and then go back to bed again. You were allowed to have two late passes per year and that was till twelve o'clock. We didn't mind; it was fun. We were all in it together. We used to, it was threepence, the tram from Commercial Road

13:30 up to the city and you could go to a film, that would be about sixpence. You could go to Myers [department store] to have American hotcakes and coffee; that was about nine pence. For about two shillings you'd have a lovely day out. So often, we were given free tickets for concerts and things for the nurses. You'd go to matron's office and say, "Are there any free tickets," and sometimes you could go to lovely things.

14:00 The circus was in town and we really wanted to go to the circus. It was before payday and none of us had any money. I said, "We'll get there, we'll go to the circus." They said, "We can't. We haven't got any money." I said, "Don't worry, we'll get there." So we went down to Worth's Circus, that's where, by the Yarra Bank, you know, the South Bank,

- 14:30 where it is now. We went there and I went to the ticket box. I said, "I gather Mr. Worth is allowing the nurses to get in for free today." "Oh, we haven't heard that." "Haven't you? Oh, we thought that was it." "Would you like to see Mr. Worth?" "Oh yes, I'd like to see Mr. Worth." We were so bold. So we went round to see Mr. Worth. "We're nurses from the Alfred and we want to see the circus. I gather
- 15:00 you're letting nurses in for free today." "Oh," he said, "I didn't know that but I can arrange that." Not only did he arrange that for us and sent us absolutely enormous box of chocolates and the best seats. You see, if you don't ask, you don't get. We were bold. We had fun.
- You were telling us about the regimentation of life there.**
- Oh yes.
- 15:30 No running in the corridors or anything like that. My brother was a medical student there as well. I wasn't allowed to talk to him on the ward. If I wanted to, I'd give him a nod and he could through to the pan room and have a little chat there. You weren't allowed to talk to people.
- 16:00 If anyone walked into the ward, you had to go, "Is there anything I can do for you?" and if you want to borrow anything from another ward, you'd have to wait in the entrance of the ward until someone came to you and you'd tell them what you'd want. It was very, very strict.
- How long did it take before**
- 16:30 **you'd made a good group of friends there?**
- I think we all came in in a group of twenty and there were six of us who became great friends and we still are great friends. That was one of them who phoned me earlier this morning. We're all tremendous friends.
- What sorts of backgrounds were those girls from?**
- 17:00 I don't know. Probably similar to my own. I know one, two, three of them were at Korowa [Anglican Girls' School] in Malvern. Jessie, she was at Clyde. I think it's gone now, I think it's amalgamated with Geelong Grammar. The other one was Turrette [?] College down in Frankston. They were all
- 17:30 well brought up little girls and all very keen to be nurses and they were good nurses. One of them, Joan, we went into the air force together, and Margaret and Shirley they went to the army together and the other two got married.
- Where did you see nursing taking you? Obviously the war had begun, did you have any idea**
- 18:00 **where you might end up?**
- No, we were all frightfully keen to be service nurses. We'd have been very cross if the war had stopped before we got there. That was our ambition, to get into the war. No, the Alfred Hospital training, it was so good and the discipline was good but
- 18:30 they did turn out very good nurses.
- How long were you at the Alfred all up?**
- Three years' course. Then Joan and I, her father was a brigadier in the army, he did the all-weather road from
- 19:00 Alice Springs up to Darwin as an engineer. He'd been right through Gallipoli too. I don't know why with a good military background like that she wanted to join the air force but Joan and I always wanted to go to the air force. However, when we finished our nursing training, the next day we got nicely dressed and made an appointment to see
- 19:30 Miss Lang, who was the matron chief of the air force and went to see her at Merton Hall, the Melbourne Girls Grammar that was taken over by the air force. Most of the schools were taken over by military people. We went up the stone steps with our appointment and with our letters saying that we were...
- 20:00 letters saying that you're all right, what do they call them, recommendations, reference, the word, that's right. Miss Lang said, "Oh, now how old are you girls?" and we said, "Twenty one," and, "How long have you been a nursing sister?" "One day."
- 20:30 "Oh, with such great age and great experience, we'll need you two straight away," of course, just sarcastic. However in the end, we went back in a couple of weeks and said, "Miss Lang, you said you wanted us straight away." "Oh yes, but I think get a bit more experience and I'll call you." I think we had to wait about three months.
- 21:00 **That was for the air force?**
- The air force, yes.

What was it about the RAAF [Royal Australian Air Force]?

I don't know. It just appealed to us. Maybe because I had done that work with the Commonwealth Aircraft Corporation it might appeal to me. Seeing all these planes being built and having done something there. I don't know but Joan and I always

21:30 thought, also it was a new service. We thought we'd like to do that.

How about the other girls, were they mainly choosing to go with the army?

Most of them would try for the army. It was sad at that time, you know, to see the doctors one day in their white coats and the next day they'd come to say goodbye to people in their army uniforms.

22:00 **What about the actual nursing duties? What do you recall of, obviously this was something that you'd wanted to do for a long time, the actual having to deal with the patients, the nitty gritty of nursing?**

You get used to that. You have this; you were very much supervised in your work.

22:30 They had those big nightingale wards, you know, twenty up this side and twenty up the other side. These days I get nervous because everyone in their little rooms, they can be missed, but these other ones I think people were looked after better really, they can't be missed then. You don't have the same privacy. All the work you did,

23:00 it was all supervised. In each ward they would have a sister and a staff nurse, a senior nurse, a second year nurse and a junior nurse and that ran the whole ward with forty people.

23:30 We did a lot of the dusting and tidying and that sort of thing. The ancillary staff, they had one person to sweep the wards and they'd do the other ones too. These days they're all top-heavy with ancillary people. That's where the money goes.

What would have been a typical day for you at the Alfred?

24:00 You'd be called up at half past five in the morning then you went dressed and on duty where you had a cup of tea and you read the report. As a junior nurse then you'd have to tidy up the lockers and put fresh water there and

24:30 make the beds. It depends on...it was standard.

In those first few months when you were just starting, when you were at your most junior, I guess?

You did all the skivvy [menial] work; it didn't do you any harm, washing,

25:00 bed pans and that sort of thing. Did a lot of cleaning. At least they were clean. A lot of bed making. Make certain all the wheels of the bed all went in the same line. Everything was regimented. In your second year, you'd do the dressings and the medications.

25:30 Bit by bit you could do everything. You always had a time with the theatre or casualty and the children's ward so you had the full treatment right through.

What did you learn about

26:00 **dealing with patients, obviously a very important aspect of what a nurse does in terms of communicating with them?**

I suppose you pick that up. You had to treat everyone with great respect. I think you just picked that up. If you were rude to them, you were out

26:30 on your...you wouldn't last a minute if you weren't polite. I suppose it's just something you learn.

Were there ever times when you felt confronted by a situation, especially in those early days where it was a real test of your mettle and people skills perhaps?

27:00 No, I think you were trained so well, I think you were very sure of yourself. I used to get terribly upset if people weren't responding to their treatment. There were two things when I was in the women's ward, the medical,

27:30 again there was a lot of poverty there. There was one, I can remember her name and I can still picture her, had this awful rheumatoid arthritis and in those days they were such painful complaints and all her joints were red and swollen and had to have methylated compresses and

28:00 things like that. If you'd touch her, she was crying. Her little kiddies, she had ten children and they'd come in dressed up in mattress, you know, black and white stripey like mattress covers. The poverty was dreadful. Eventually she died that one, I worked so hard with her and

28:30 you get, even now after nursing other people in Ceylon and whatever, I get terribly upset, I feel as

though I was defeated if they died. Another woman tried to commit suicide with swallowing Lysol [disinfectant, mixture of cresol and oil] and burnt her throat. Then again,

29:00 she eventually died; you worked so hard but it's so kind to her if she does die. I don't know. You feel as if you get very, I used to get very upset if my patients died.

What would keep you going? You're there to help

29:30 **and save lives if you can, how do you find the strength?**

I suppose sometimes you can't. You can't make everyone better. Those are the two things. People, they were just so poor things with no one to really help them and look after them. Those two people I'll always remember.

30:00 Mrs. Cook with all her children dressed up in mattress covers and the drunken husband. Then maybe it's best if she did die. I often wonder what happened to people after, the kiddies.

You must have learnt a lot about how to, with that family for example.

30:30 Yes. Those days, I was thinking with the children, in the children's ward, they only had visiting hours there between two and four on a Sunday. They thought that children got on very much better if they were away from their parents and they settled in better.

31:00 When it came to Sunday and the parents would arrive, after two hours when they had to go home again, the screaming and the noise. Now of course they can come in and out of the wards all the time, can't they?

What was your opinion of that reasoning?

I didn't know any different. I thought that's what they thought was the thing to do

31:30 and you could get on with the work of looking after them. Then the parents, they could always phone to see how they were. Then we'd always, if the parents brought any food, lockers for each of

32:00 the children by the entrance hall and they brought their food and you'd put them in their lockers because some of the children might be on special diets, you know, for kidney things or that and the other. Then we'd have to give them after it was suitable. Those days were two hours and once a week. Now people go in and out,

32:30 which I think is probably better. Those kiddies that day, at the end of Sunday was very noisy but apart from that they got used to that. I think it's more kind to have the parents in and out all the time.

Do you remember the first time

33:00 **you worked in the operating theatre?**

Yes, it never worried me. I like people. If you're in the operating theatre, I enjoyed it but you didn't get to know your people, they were anaesthetized when they came in. All the clinical and surgical

33:30 was done but it didn't worry me all this sort of thing, but you didn't know the people.

Obviously the Alfred was and is a very fine hospital. What was it like technologically, what was the state of affairs then?

They were as up to date as well as they could be

34:00 at that time. I was there when they first started with antibiotics. They didn't have penicillin, when I was there they had a new thing was called dagennum [?] solution and a thick white stuff and that was one of the early antibiotics. Had to be given only by the sister,

34:30 an intravenous thing. Then they had these M&B tablets, May and Baker, the name of the firm, 612 or 693 and different things, but that was just a start. We didn't have penicillin then; that came later. When it came to pneumonia people, it was all plain nursing.

35:00 When they got the high temperatures, we'd have to sponge them down to try and bring the temperature down. When they got to crisis and then got very cold, we'd pack them up and try to bring the temperature up and down again. It was all bedside nursing. You don't get that bedside nursing now,

35:30 not in the same way. They just give a jab of something and they're better, up the next day.

Do you think perhaps we've lost something because of that?

I think the bedside nursing, I know. I don't think they're as kind to the patients, it's all rush, rush, rush. All very technical but I think there could be more compassion

36:00 for their patients and have a little time to talk to them and make certain they're comfortable. It's all very technical. They get better so quickly. We'd have people having their hernias done in bed for two

weeks then have another week just

- 36:30 wandering around the ward until it gets better. It was all a more slower business. People had more time in hospital but now you have these things and you're out the next day. So you don't really get to know your patients these days as you did in those days.

That must have made it harder too because you get to know people better. It sounds like you

- 37:00 **almost formed friendships with people. That would make it then harder when you do perhaps lose someone or lose touch with people.**

Well yes, you'd never be too intimate with anyone. Kind and listen, that sort of thing. Always a bit of a barrier between the doctors and the nurses, and the patients.

- 37:30 **Even between doctors and nurses because you did say it was very regimented and you weren't allowed to chat?**

Yes, you were so polite to everyone. Hands behind your back to talk to a doctor, yes, and those sort of things. No Christian names. It was a different way of life, more regimented.

- 38:00 **What about socially, you said you only had two late passes a year?**

Then you had to come in twelve o'clock and then you had to come back and say, "Matron, I'm home," and then go to bed. That would be for something very special.

Do you remember any of those?

People's twenty-first birthdays, that sort of thing. Then again,

- 38:30 in wartime, there wasn't so much, all your old friends were in the Middle East, people you would be going out with. Used to, sometimes you'd get, go to one of these dances where there was a ship in and someone, one of these social things, would say could some of the nurses come to

- 39:00 a party we're having and that sort of thing. There wasn't very much social life. We made our own fun. We'd go to the Glaciarium and ice skate and go to films and go to the circus. We worked so hard. Of course, we'd have our day off when we'd be able to go home.

- 39:30 I had one lovely holiday down at Warrnambool, Peterborough when one of my friend's people had a sheep station there and their main shearer had been called up and her brother who was in the air force, he was allowed special leave because of the sheep shearing time. Mrs Cumming asked if Jess,

- 40:00 her daughter, could get two of the girls to come down to help. That was fun. We had two weeks off to help with the sheep shearing.

Actually help with the sheep shearing?

Yes. It was fun. Again you felt you were giving to the war effort, because her brother was given special leave from the air force and it was important that these jobs were still done.

Tape 3

- 00:33 **You were working at the Alfred and then...**

Yes, and Miss Lang who was matron of the air force said, "Well, I'll call you up soon, but just go and work in another hospital," and I went to St Ives, which is a private hospital in Punt Road. I worked there in a normal private hospital

- 01:00 until I got my call up.

How did that...?

That was, I remember one patient I had there was a man called Dr Smith. He had been the governor of the Indonesian Jakarta Bank, the ones who used to sign the guilders in Indonesia, but when they

- 01:30 came into the war and the Japanese had overrun them, and they had the Dutch people in higher positions came down to start a Dutch government in Australia. They left all their wives and families there, and they were all put in civilian internees by this big fat Dutchman.

- 02:00 They were living in the Menzies Hotel and ran life with, "The Queen [Wilhelmina of the Netherlands] will pay for our expenses." They had no idea what happened to their wives and children. Let's hope they'd be all right. The other person who was living in that hotel was MacArthur. He had his headquarters

- 02:30 there. Yes. That is just a thing I remember, one of the patients I looked after there.

This is at St Ives?

Yes, and he asked that the staff who looked after him to go back to the Menzies Hotel and have a lovely dinner. The Dutch queen paid for that lot, it was champagne and the lot, while these wives and children were all up in Jakarta or probably

03:00 in Changi or civilian internees.

Why did you leave the Alfred and go to St Ives?

Because I finished my time at the Alfred and I had to get employment at some other hospital. It was all good

03:30 experience, different ways of nursing and different types of nursing. It was a very good hospital. It was right near the Melbourne Cricket Ground so we'd nip across and see the matches there too. It was nice.

How was the experience different?

Well, after a public hospital, it was very smart, private hospital; all their single rooms and everything. Very, very different

04:00 from public hospital. But the treatment and that sort of thing was just the same and you had all the top surgeons or medical people there who worked there. You learned a lot.

How long were you at St Ives?

Only about four months until I was called-up but I really enjoyed being there. It was good. I learned a lot.

04:30 You registered for nursing duty during the war?

Yes, I had my name down with Miss Lang who was a matron chief, to be called-up as soon as a placement was available. Then again they would call up 14 at a time and when we were called up, we went to a place called

05:00 Arundel in Victoria. I think it had been a mental hospital. It was more like that when we arrived there too. There were 14 doctors and 14 nurses. We had to learn about air force administration, and we had to learn tropical medicine. Just the way the air force worked and all the

05:30 different paperwork you had to get used to, different forms that had to be filled in. That was very, very interesting. Yes. Also the retired Welsh guardsmen who used to train us with marching. We weren't very good at that, all the doctors and the nurses. Then

06:00 during that time, we all were measured for our uniforms, so we had days up to the tailors and all this equipment we had to get and so on. Just being equipped mentally with the way of the air force and physically with our uniforms and everything like that. Wednesday, half day, all around the world was always

06:30 with the services, sports day. Wednesday afternoon. So we thought we'd have a football match: nurses versus the doctors. We weren't very popular about that. That wasn't a very good thing to do. That was told to headquarters. We were told we were not allowed to do that sort of thing. It wasn't very good.

07:00 Did you have the match though?

Oh yes, we had the match. It was only after we were reprimanded. Then we weren't very good with our marching, so when it came we were going to have a march past when we got through our exams, we weren't good enough. We had to just go through into a hall and then the head of the

07:30 medical air force came and spoke to us. No way would the Welsh guardsmen let us go on a parade. Ninny Allen, she could never get her arms and legs to work together. She'd have both left arms and the legs and this one's going this way. She'd spoil any parade. Then when she got her new hat, that blew off and,

08:00 "Oh, it's my new hat." So she raced away to get it. You shouldn't break ranks. We weren't good when it came to marching, but when it came to being non-combative people, if there was a parade we were supposed to stand behind the flagpole, not in front. All to do with Geneva, what medical people could do and what

08:30 medical people could not do. We didn't have to salute as medical people. Nurses, we didn't salute, we just smiled.

You were officially officers?

Yes, we were. Strangely enough, in World War I, the nurses were not commissioned. They weren't. In this one they were. We all came up as

09:00 flight officers with one stripe.

Your decision to join RAAF medical corps, why the RAAF?

I don't know. I think my friend Joan and I just thought it was a new one, and it's smaller. The army one, it was just a

- 09:30 vast...they had hundreds of them. It was just a new one. We just liked to be in that. I don't know why, but earlier on we decided that's the one we wanted to join.

When you went to Arundel for training, did you know any of the other people you were training with?

Some, yes. But there were different from different states,

- 10:00 Western Australia and Queensland. That was good, because when you go to your own training hospital, you think the way you've been taught to do it is the right way. But you see, they've been taught something else, so the end result is just the same, but you have different ways of getting it. So that was good, comparing different ways to do
- 10:30 medical techniques. That was good. Unfortunately Joan, my friend, she couldn't get released; she was at a Freemasons hospital and she couldn't get her release straightaway so she went in about two months after me, so we ended up at Concord in NSW [New South Wales] together, but as I got in a little bit earlier, I
- 11:00 knew some of the other girls and met new friends from the other different states. I knew quite a lot of the doctors from the Alfred Hospital. I was very, very happy. Also, one of the tutor sisters there, Nora Marsh, she was teaching the air force orderlies. I met her on my very first day when
- 11:30 I was in the air force. I met her several times during my time I was working with the air force, and I met her on the very last day. She was one of my dearest friends. Then, when I was living in Singapore - she stayed in the air force, she was 27 years in the air force - she was up at Butterworth in Penang and she used to come to see me in Singapore when I was living there. She just died too,
- 12:00 a couple of months ago. Some of those friends you made there, they're just long wonderful friends. After that we got our equipment and our uniforms and we knew how all the different forms and tropical medicine and all these things, then you got your postings. I was posted to
- 12:30 Concord in NSW. Then you always get your, I can't remember the name, you didn't have to buy your tickets. All your movements or orders would be given to you and you were just first class in the Spirit Of Progress. You'd be met and taken there and we were
- 13:00 well looked after.

How long was that training period at Arundel for?

Two months.

What did you learn there that you didn't already know?

Well, I didn't know very much about the tropical medicine, the malarias and dengue and

- 13:30 those things. And also we had to learn about how to set up a camp hospital with lavatories and kitchen and things like that, tented hospitals, you had to learn about that. You had to learn about air force administration, which is quite different from your own hospital
- 14:00 administration; all the different forms you had to fill in. Just more or less the whole way the air force ticked over. You'd get the most interesting people in headquarters coming down to give you these lectures. It was very, very interesting and different.

Did you have actual patients?

- 14:30 No. No patients. It was all just classroom work.

What were the protocols like?

Yes, we'd have to learn all about the different ranks for the army, navy and air force, the whole thing, and what compare they went

- 15:00 from one service to the other and how the non-commissioned people, the LACs [Leading Aircraftsmen] and the corporals and the sergeants and so forth, and warrant officers. Then you have your lieutenants and the pilot officers and what goes along; wing commanders, squadron leaders.
- 15:30 You had to learn all those, their different ranks.

Presumably the same protocols were there between the nurses and the doctors?

Well, yes. I think we were disciplined. I think it ticks over very much better if you do have discipline.

- 16:00 Give honour where honour is due.

What was the camaraderie like?

Happy, there was a laugh a minute there. That was great fun at Arundel. We enjoyed that.

When you finished your lectures for the day, what did you do?

We had lots of writing up and study.

16:30 It was really hard work to do this. It was all so different for us. No, we weren't socialising with the others. It wasn't strict, but we had our meals there together. No hanky-panky.

17:00 Did you have leave?

I think yes, at the weekend. We could go home at the weekends except I don't know where the interstate people went. I think I used to come home at the weekends. Looking back I can't remember all these things.

With your posting

17:30 **to Concord, were you given any briefing before you went there? What to expect or what would be required of you?**

Yes, when you went there, you would report to matron, properly dressed. Then she'd tell you which ward you were allotted to. Then the others, that's the first time they had

18:00 the officers' training course for medical people before, the other ones, who had just been thrown into the deep end, straight to the wards, to learn, they said, "We don't have to tell you anything, 'cos you know everything." A bit of jealousy about the new intake. No, it all worked out all right.

Did you feel like you

18:30 **were thrown in at the deep end in any way?**

No, we weren't. I was trained before. But the other girls without knowing all about the forms and that sort of thing, they had to learn on the job whereas we'd been taught all these things before we got there. They didn't look strange or foreign to us, these forms and things. There was always a lot of paperwork.

19:00 **What ward did you start in?**

The first ward I went to was the WAAAF [Women's Auxiliary Australian Air Force] ward. It was a mile walk in this duckboard, wards, you know anything about those? This way from the nurses' home to the dining room and then down to the duckboard, it was a mile. If you've seen that film All Saints,

19:30 that's Concord, with the river running by. I think there was a senior sister, myself and then orderlies. It was just general nursing. When they came into the air force, they were all fit and well. It

20:00 wasn't like other nursing with the strokes and the heart attacks and things. They were a lot of very minor injuries or things.

What war injuries were you treating?

A lot of those would be sports

20:30 injuries with the girls, I really can't... in the men's ward, that was different. There would be more injuries, but no, just different medical complaints. I can't remember what the... Gynae [gynaecological] and those sorts of things with the girls.

21:00 I don't think there were fateful things. After that I had the skin ward and

21:30 then I had the psych [psychiatric] ward and then the officers' ward.

Tell me about the skin ward.

That was dreadful. These people who'd be coming down from the tropics with awful skin ulcers. They'd been in their army clothes and that sort of thing and their boots were wet and then they'd dry and they would get

22:00 these awful ulcers and skin complaints. Very, very troublesome for them. There were many of these tropical ulcers and tropical skin disorders. Most of them had just

22:30 a jolly good rest. When they'd had a good rest, they would be cleared out. That was very, you had to scratch yourself all the time. It was very unhappy people. I remember one dentist there. He was up in Darwin and got all these wretched skin disorders.

23:00 It was all over his body. All his skin was peeling off. He was almost at the point to get out of the air force, but he said, "No way could I go to a private practice until I've got this all cleared up. They won't

come to me looking like this." It takes a long time to get the skin sorted out. So often if you stress.

23:30 **Did you have any burns?**

That was a different ward. We'd have other burns in the officers' ward with the pilots. Yes, we'd have lots of burns and injuries. I remember I came across a letter I had written to my mother

24:00 saying that "three of the boys here have been shot down. If you put them together, you could put together one complete person." There were so many bits missing from these accidents there.

Was this shocking for you?

24:30 I wouldn't say shocking. It was something that had to be treated and looked after. No way would you let them know that you're sorry for them cos they don't want to feel sorry for themselves. You have to keep up the morale all the time. They used to joke about things. You made certain they joked about things too. If you start

25:00 to feel sorry for yourself, you'll go under. I remember one lad, when I was on night duty in the officers' ward, a lot of these had come back from England, the Battle of Britain and that sort of thing, and been flying there night after night, and all these sirens and things.

25:30 I was walking down there and tripped. They had these iron screens, tripped over that and half the boys were under their bed. This crash, you know? Instant reaction. Go for a cover, yes. I said, "Don't worry. I was just stupid enough to kick the screen." Instant reaction. The noise.

26:00 They were brave boys. They were so brave. I'd be odds on if they'd be well enough to get civilian employment when they got home.

Tell me more about how you were able to boost their morale.

26:30 Keep them busy; a lot of handwork. The Red Cross people were very good. They used to come round with making baskets and weaving and keep them busy, that was the art of this. So that there were lots of books to read, handwork to do and anything, just good food,

27:00 and just make certain they didn't have time to feel sorry for themselves. That's it.

In the skin ward, what treatment did you use on the ulcers?

It's hard to remember back

27:30 to what we had. I used to have a lot of these pastes and I can't remember the treatment we had there. I wish I could remember. Different pastes and things we'd apply and

28:00 I really can't remember; probably a lot of saline. I honestly cannot remember the treatment.

How long would it take for an ulcer to heal?

Some time, probably weeks. Weeks. I can't remember the treatment we

28:30 used to have.

Where had these servicemen been fighting?

They would be up in New Guinea in the hot climate, jungle warfare, most of them. I wish I could remember how we treated that, but

29:00 I can't remember all the different solutions and things. It's a long time ago.

Did they tell you much about their experiences of war?

I suppose they did. That again I can't remember. If they did, I bet we'd hear the funny sides. You wouldn't hear all the tragic sides. I think Australians

29:30 are very good like that. They can always turn things around for their advantage. If a thing's really tragic, they pretend it's funny. I don't think they dwell on the unhappy things. Doesn't get you any further, does it? I think most of them were very brave

30:00 people, but they wouldn't dwell on the bad side. They can always remember the happy things.

Did you enjoy working there?

Yes I did. After that I went to the psychiatry ward, the psychs. Again, keep them busy all the time. We had an absolutely wonderful orderly. We

30:30 used to have them playing a lot of board games and things. Then we had a garden, I always have gardens wherever I go. I got them to grow veggies and things there. Again, just keep them busy so they didn't dwell on their unhappiness. Then the day before the specialists come, they'd come twice a week,

and they'd always write down what's troubling

31:00 them. Yes, the night before the specialist came, they were all with their bits of paper and envelopes and write down. They didn't like to tell you what was worrying them so they'd write down all these things. Next morning when I came to my desk, all these envelopes to the surgeon from the patient. It was lovely opening

31:30 them; all their troubles. I was about 23 then. I learned a lot, what goes through people's minds. I think a lot of them were people who had been unhappy in marriage and those things. They'd been up in the islands and their wives had run away with Americans

32:00 and a lot of them had low moral fibre before they went away. They couldn't cope with army or air force life. I think you'll find divorce in the family and I think the ones who really cracked were many very low moral fibre

32:30 to start with. I think that happens with Vietnam people. They just were called out, weren't examined better mentally to see if they were suitable for military life. A lot of them, they weren't. They shouldn't have been there anyway. You know what

33:00 I mean?

What did "low moral fibre" actually mean back then?

I wouldn't say. Just that they were not able to cope with the military way of life, yes. You can't blame them. They just didn't have their...a lot of people can cope with it better than other people.

33:30 They weren't the sort of people who should have been in the services anyway if they went into deep down. There wasn't time to deep down to make certain mentally morally they were all right. We found that most of them had a very poor

34:00 mental background before they went in.

This was on their records?

No, you found after. Talk to them. You find that their parents are divorced and they'd been abandoned and things like that, a lot of unhappiness before they were in the services.

34:30 And after that they had a lot, when they were married and they were up in the islands, and their wives hadn't been faithful to them. Some of them really had just been cracked with battle fatigue.

You would read their letters?

35:00 Yes, I'd read through those. Give them to the doctors. That took a whole day to get through that lot.

Can you recall any?

I wouldn't dare say it.

They can remain anonymous.

No.

What sorts of things troubled them?

Sexual hang-ups and those sorts of things. We were so immature,

35:30 the girls in those days. I was 23, I didn't know much. I learned a lot after I finished that ward. Yes, I did. No, there was a lot of sexual hang-ups and that sort of thing.

But they'd been away to war. What need did they have for...?

Later. I won't go into that too much. A lot

36:00 of them were unhappy when they got back.

How long would they stay on the ward under treatment?

Most of them, some of them got through very quickly, but it was just, the main thing was we made certain they had a good night's sleep, make certain they were busy right through the day, and just to make

36:30 them realise that life was worthwhile. We had people coming round to see them. We had the chaplains who'd come round to see them. We kept them busy. It was worthwhile. Very few of them were really

37:00 quite bonkers. You could sort them out, send them away feeling happier. They were a nice lot, yes. When I met other people on my days off, I thought they were quite brilliant having had a week's talking to these people. I felt, you met normal people, I felt quite brilliant. Then

- 37:30 after that, I thought, "I won't imagine myself having done six months with this, I wonder if I could have a change. Yes, I'm going to have a change. If you see next week's roster, she put there in the same ward on night duty. Yes, that was a nice change." One very funny thing happened. Should I put this in or not? My
- 38:00 orderly I had on night duty, one of the more mature of the orderlies, a bit older than most. Between 12 and 1, they go for their supper. Did I tell you this? He was always very keen to get down to supper. Then it turned out that he was meeting with a red-haired girl from the laundry
- 38:30 in this one hour before his supper. He used to meet her at the CO's [Commanding Officer] office, which was down the corridor from my ward. The commanding officer! Of course, there was no one likely to go there. Having his little affair with the laundry girl. Unfortunately an adjutant for some reason wanted to get papers from the CO's office. He found
- 39:00 my orderly and the laundry girl flat on the floor in the CO's office. So it had to be reported. He would be put on a charge, not behaving properly when he was supposed to be on duty on the wards. So he was put on a charge. The CO couldn't bear this adjutant and
- 39:30 the adjutant didn't think much of the CO. So the charge, and they were all brought in and he said to me, "At what time off did your orderly have?" I said, "One or two." "Was that for supper?" I said, "Yes, that was for supper." Then the adjutant said, "And I went there to get the paper from your office and what do I see? These two
- 40:00 flat on the floor in your office," and so exactly what they were doing. The CO, who couldn't bear this adjutant, said, "Orderly LAC so-and-so behaving in a perfectly normal way, charge dismissed." That was that. Just to keep even with the orderly,
- 40:30 you should wipe that out, or do you think that's funny?

Tape 4

00:35 Tell me about Wing Commander Cater?

He was a legend in the air force. He came from a country family, had lovely properties, a very good doctor. He owned his own

01:00 plane, he had his own yacht and he would do this big game shooting. But when he was up in New Guinea, he went absent without leave and joined up with the army in the jungle to try to kill Japanese, which he did. When he got back to base hospital, they had to put him on a charge, or a court-martial for being absent

01:30 without leave, AWOL. (UNCLEAR) all the work he did with the general with the army people to commend him for the work he had done. I think he got some sort of an award. Yes, he was what I call a colourful character. He was a great, great person.

What did you have to do with him?

He was the CO of the hospital at

02:00 Concord.

You would see him on the wards?

Yes.

What circumstances would you see him?

You knew the CO very well. He'd always come round to see patients. He just ran the hospital. You were quite aware who the commander was.

02:30 You had quite a lot to do with him. Any complaints you went to him or the other matron. You got to know all these people. You had a very official position yourself.

03:00 Can you recall any stories about him?

I remember when Laurence Olivier and Vivien Leigh - that was post-war, cos I had three times I was at Concord - they came over for a tour and they were doing about four plays, I think they were brought out

03:30 by the British Council. Most these important people always come round to visit troops and that sort of thing. The same Nick Cater, he had just been put in a blood transfusion. He still had a lot of blood from his fight thing. These two, Vivien Leigh and Laurence Olivier came and I

04:00 said, "You're supposed to go and see them, take them round." He said, "I'll go down." I said, "Take that gown." He was a law to himself. He wouldn't have minded if he'd gone to meet them with his blood-stained white gown, just a happy law unto himself sort of person.

04:30 **Were you in awe of him?**

Not at all. No, not at all. I admired him; he was good, nice man.

What was he like with the patients?

Very good. A very good doctor. I think he was very much a man's man. I think the patients would have looked up to him.

05:00 Then the other thing you had to be very careful about when you were on night duty, and the war had finished, and some of the boys had just come back from the jungle and they're very keen to get home to see their relations. They'd ask could they have time off.

05:30 They were admitted to the hospital, but, "Could we go home?" They said, "You can have from 2 to 6." Then come 9 and 10, 11, all of a sudden you see a bunch of flowers or a box of chocolates coming round the nurses' room. "We're very sorry, we're a bit late." I never

06:00 said they'd been away for such a long time. I was there when it was VJ [Victory over Japan] day. Was it VJ day or VP [Victory in the Pacific Day]? Then there was going to be a parade in the city. These people, they just got out and went. They left there. The ones

06:30 who were tied to the bed, they got wheelchairs and took them too, took them up to Sydney. Some of them we didn't see for 2 or 3 days after, then they came back to go back to hospital again. The whole thing was very...I didn't blame them. (UNCLEAR) in those days.

Did they send anyone

07:00 **after them?**

No, they knew they'd come back. If they didn't turn up, well, it was exciting the things that were going to happen in Sydney. Of course, they'd been away for such a long time; of course, they wanted to be part of it. I didn't mind. I was sorry I couldn't go up there too.

You were going to tell me about the charge sheet.

Oh yes.

07:30 I always remember this, the 12-8-12. If they did anything that wasn't right, they said, "Oh, no, don't." If they're late on duty and the lads would say, "Don't put me on the 12-8-12. I'm sorry, I won't be late again." Another thing we could never, ever do, if they came on duty drunk.

08:00 You could say to them, "You are not in the position to carry on your duties." "Oh, yes I am." They were trying to get you to say, "I'm drunk." A nurse was not allowed to say that. I don't know why you're not allowed to say that, but one man, he was a warrant officer too, and a very good orderly too, he came on so drunk and

08:30 kept bashing into the beds and bashing the iron bed as he turned up. I said, "Please go off duty." "Oh, I can carry on my duties quite good." "I don't think you can." "Oh yes, I can." At any rate, I had to phone through one of the doctors and say, "Would you come down, I have trouble here." Immediately he saw and said,

09:00 "Warrant Officer so and so," I can't remember the name, "you're drunk." For some reason, a nurse was not allowed to say that but he could. He was put in prison for two weeks. When he came back, he said, "It was such a lovely holiday. Best holiday I ever had."

09:30 There weren't any trouble, but you could threaten to put them on a charge if they didn't come on duty at the right time.

What about yourself? Did you ever have any mishaps?

By doing the wrong thing? No, I don't think so. No, I was never reprimanded.

10:00 No. I don't think so. I enjoyed my work. No, I don't think I had any. Oh, one thing, I think when I was in the WAAAF ward. I had my day off and it was a lovely day. I'd been down to Bondi, had the whole day with a picnic and

10:30 swimming and sunbathing, but I got so badly burned, so terribly badly burnt. Fortunately I was in the WAAAF ward. You see, that was firstly a self-imposed injury and you don't get any sympathy for things like that. So the matron would always do her round and these

11:00 starch uniforms on your sunburn, it was dreadful. As soon as she had done her round, I got a nice white gown and just left my knickers and bra on. I put that on instead of the starchy thing. No, you didn't get

any marks if you got sunburned. I still remember that.

11:30 Apart from that, I can't think of anything bad I did.

It must have been interesting going to Sydney after growing up in Melbourne. Was it?

Yes. I enjoyed that. After that, I was sent to Bradfield Park. That was where people came when they first

12:00 joined the air force, they went to Bradfield Park. And when they were discharged they went to Bradfield Park. A big station there. That was all normal work there. It was from there I went and got my posting for MEATU, which is Medical Evacuation Air Transport Unit. Two other units were further

12:30 up in Nadzab and Morotai bringing down the sick and wounded. This is to escort people back to the mainland. Then, with the thought of the POWs [Prisoners of War], they wanted a third unit of MEATU. So I had to join this. Then, again back to Arundel to be trained to do medical evacuation work. Then I went up to Townsville. That's the best

13:00 of the lot. It was lovely. Nice sort of work. It was wonderful. The other girls up in Nadzab and the second lot were in Morotai. So they'd get their battle casualties or whatever and go in hops from one to Morotai, then Morotai to Townsville. The people in Townsville would bring them down to their own home states

13:30 and escort them in the planes, old Dakotas. They weren't, no compression. You couldn't fly more than 10,000 feet otherwise you'd need oxygen.

14:00 It could take 25 people. It would take a mixture of stretcher people and walking wounded.

What did you like about that work?

It was lovely. It was really outdoor work and it was wonderful

14:30 flying all the time. You'd be up about 3 in the morning. The night before, you'd get your manifests of the lists of the people and you go and they'd be bedded down there the night before. Then we'd see them, decide what

15:00 height they would fly, which was easier for them. You had to tell the pilot what height was best for them, their complaint. You decide who should be a stretcher, who could be sitting down. Then the ambulance people would come. It would be there at 3 o'clock in the morning, the ambulance would be there. Then we'd start to load the planes. We did the

15:30 loading ourselves with the orderlies. We were strong girls. They had three loads of them, three litters. Then the Red Cross would give you sandwiches. You'd have your tea urns, you had your medical kit and your oxygen with them. And we looked after them in the

16:00 aeroplane and take them back to where they were supposed to go. It could be Brisbane or Sydney or Western Australia perhaps, their home state.

How did you determine what height the plane would fly?

If they had trouble with

16:30 their chest, you could get, I can't remember how it worked now. The bones and fractures, it was better for them to fly high. It was steadier for them. If there were troubles with their breathing, it was better

17:00 if they were. I can't remember how it worked now. We used to have to tell the pilots what height we wanted them to fly. I can't remember how it worked now, that sort of thing. Then we used to feed them there and just look after them, give them any medication they needed.

17:30 It was lovely. Good work. We'd have him taken back to their destination. Then we would have to get back as quickly as we could to our own base, which was Garbutt in Townsville. We'd go first to the Australians to see...would have number 2 priority,

18:00 only the very VIPs [Very Important Persons] got number 1, we'd get number 2 priority. We'd go first to the Australians to see if they had a spare seat. Often you were just sitting on the top of cabbages or bundles of mail and that sort of thing. Then you'd go to the English and the Dutch

18:30 and last of the lot we'd go to the Americans. We didn't like flying with them. We had to get back as soon as we could to our own base.

So you just had to go and find yourself a plane somewhere?

Yes. They were all military planes. You rush around

19:00 from one place to the other. But you normally get back through your own boys, 36 Squadron.

Why in that order?

The Americans didn't have any navigators. They just had to fly along the coast. They weren't very brave. They weren't very good.

- 19:30 We trusted our own boys. You were supposed to be home by 3 o'clock. Before that, the tropical fronts and the plane was pitched this way and that. It was very dicey with the tropical fronts. The weather would come down.
- 20:00 We'd try to get back by 3 o'clock. Then you'd go through your medical kit and replace anything you needed. Then you'd get undressed, take all your things, wash them, hang them up. In two minutes they were dry. Iron them up all ready for next day. Then go to the headquarters to find what you
- 20:30 had to do the next day. It was busy, but you had no days off, nothing like that. It was work, work, work, especially when we were bringing the POWs home. That was lovely, very emotional when they'd been locked up for so long. They were so appreciative of anything you did for them. Then
- 21:00 when we took them back to their own home states, there was always the governor or the prime minister. There would always be a VIP to meet them as well as the Red Cross would have got in touch with their own next of kin. There'd be a good, for their reunion. Sometimes some of them had to go straight to Heidelberg or
- 21:30 Concord or wherever it might be, cos they weren't well enough. At least they had their...then the Red Cross would make certain they went to the hospitals to see them. Always some one VIP to welcome them back to Australia. Oh, the tears. I remember it was emotional. They hadn't seen their own people for 3 or 4 years. Skinny old
- 22:00 things they were too. I think that's the best job I've ever, ever had. Wonderful. We made a great mistake first, giving them far too much to eat. Their tummies weren't used to it. The Red Cross people would give them beers and things. That would be
- 22:30 big steaks and things. All they need to have is very small amounts of food and gentle on their tummies. A lot of them had to be kept up there and fattened up before they could even come back to their own homeland.

Were you getting to know any of these people

- 23:00 **very well? Was it new people every day for you?**

No, there were new ones every day. I remember once there was a New Zealand doctor, Doctor Johns, who had been in the New Zealand army. There was Brigadier Callaghan, Gallagher, I can't remember, one of the top brass,

- 23:30 and Australian. They'd been POWs. If they were bedding the night before they went on, we'd say to them, "What would you like to do? Would you like to go to the mess to talk to the other boys?" if they didn't have to stay in bed, if they were what we called walking wounded, "or would you like to, there's a dance, would you like to see that? Or would you like
- 24:00 to see films?" Different things happening on the station. I remember they said, "Oh, we'd love to see a film." "Yes, we'll take you there." There was a film on the station. I remember they used to have the newsreels. The first thing they showed was about Japanese atrocities in...I felt awful. I said, "Do you want to see this?" "Yes, we would like to see how things are being
- 24:30 reported about the treatment of the POWs." This was the first newsreel that came on. I felt so embarrassed. They were very pleased to see how it was being reported to people at home. Things like that you do remember.

They wanted people to know?

Yes.

- 25:00 They were quite interested. I must say I felt very embarrassed when that was going to be on the first newsreel. It was lovely when they met up with their own wives and mothers, very emotional. Most of them had to go straight to hospital to
- 25:30 have a good check-up. A lot of them had been checked-up in Singapore before they came down south.

Were there many seriously sick?

Oh, yes. They were full of dengue and malaria and lots of tuberculosis. They were so thin. Huge people were weighing about 6 stone.

- 26:00 Yes, they were sick, sick people.

How did they handle the flights?

We just made them comfortable. Yes. Gave them the treatment they needed. Some were very, very sick.

26:30 Sometimes you had to give them transfusions and things.

During the flight?

Yes. No, it was, most of them were very, very sick people. I didn't have any deaths in the plane, fortunately. They were very, very sick people. The ambulance would be there as soon as we arrived

27:00 to take them on to their hospitals. Our agents were very, very good. I remember one group of English POWs. They'd never been to Australia before. We were coming from Brisbane to I think we were supposed to

27:30 go to Sydney. Now, this lad was a Melbourne boy, the pilot. I think we started from Townsville, hopping from there to Brisbane and on. He said, "Look, these boys are English. They've never, ever seen Australia before. They must see as much of this as they can." So he went on there

28:00 and to Sydney, all round and round so we had a good view of everything. Then he said, "Now I think they should have a look at Canberra." Off he went, more catch-up, went round and round Canberra. Then he said, "Now, we'll go on to Melbourne, cos that's my hometown, and I think they can get off there." They were supposed to get off at Sydney. So off he went to

28:30 Melbourne. Then they had to get ambulances and things there. I got all that sorted out. Then they said they had to be sent back to Sydney, the boys, cos that's where they were going to get a boat, I think, to send them back to England again. This warrant officer, the pilot, then he was able to go home to his own home

29:00 to see his parents. Then when he got back to Townsville, he was court-martialled, put in the prison for a while. It was fun. He just thought those boys would never have a chance to see Australia, so it was kind of him, but didn't do his records much good.

29:30 He was reprimanded for doing that.

So he landed in Melbourne with the POWs?

Yes.

Then what happened to them?

They had to be sent back to Sydney. Then we all had to go back to Townsville. Then he was reprimanded. I don't know, a lot of people did a lot of things like, not normal,

30:00 but why not?

Do you have any enduring friendships from those days?

Just from the girls. Yes, those ones, and the air force ones, the air force nursing sisters. After the, when I left in '51, then I went to England. Then I was in

30:30 Ceylon, then Malaya, Singapore, Bahrain and England. I'd been away well over about 30-40 years. So, when I came back here 8 years ago, it was nice to meet up with these people again. But I'd been away such a long time. One of my friends over there in England said,

31:00 and she'd been in the air force in England, she said, "When you get back to Australia, get in touch with your service friends because you've always got something in common with them," which I did. That year was what they call the "Australia Remembers Year." It was 50 years from

31:30 VJ day and they were going to have a parade through the city and that sort of thing, so I arranged to have that. Since then, I've been vice president of the ex-service nurses returned services club, president of the ex-air force nurses, on the committee for the ex-

32:00 servicemen and a trustee of the Florence Nightingale Trust for nurses from Victoria. I think when they saw a new face they thought, "We've been doing this for so long, it'd be lovely to have someone new to do it," so I got into a lot of these things and now I haven't got enough time for myself. But it's all worthwhile work,

32:30 it is. And these are my friends here, my ex-service people, and you've always got something to talk about and lots of people to help. I enjoy it.

It seems there is more to talk about your time in

33:00 **Concord and Bradfield Park. Just a matter of you being able to remember.**

Yes, and I had different postings after that when we got all the POWs down and that work finished, the war was over, the POWs were home again. Then we went back to normal

33:30 nursing with the air force. So I think at that stage I was posted to Heidelberg. That was in the tuberculosis ward there, which was full of these POWs who contracted that when they were guests of the Japanese.

- 34:00 I was looking after them there. Some of them there, they were so ill, so very ill. I think about three years those POWs not properly fed or looked after. During that time, there was a Japanese
- 34:30 POW who had been found had tuberculosis. He was put in this ward. These other boys, our own boys, they said, "If you go in there, don't come near to see us. We don't want you to even touch or look at him." The feeling was so awful. In the end they had
- 35:00 three people looking after him, morning, noon and night. They had to move this Japanese to another hospital. These other ones who had been guests of the Japanese, they were so bitter; very, very bitter.

How had the Japanese POW come to be here?

I don't know. I suppose we had POW camps here.

- 35:30 Maybe a pilot that had been shot down, I don't know. They had some in there. Also there was an English navy lad. He was a person who was put in a single room there. I was attending this man. He used to play cricket for Surrey or Sussex. I think Surrey. This is the first time the English test team
- 36:00 had come out post-war. He knew the Bedser twins. They were very famous cricketers who were in this English team. So he wrote to them and said, I think they were staying at the Windsor Hotel, "I am a patient here. If you have any chance to come to see me, I would be very..."
- 36:30 they were old friends. They had all played cricket together. So the next thing, on the Saturday just before they started their test match in the MCG [Melbourne Cricket Ground], the whole of the English test team came in to see these boys. That was so good. It was just so good. Good for morale. Here was the hero of the day and you're getting all these boys to see them. You saw lovely things happening.
- 37:00 It was good.

Do you mean generous acts?

Yes, exactly. That was the morale. They were all in their blazers and their nice smart trousers going round to see all these. Went and spoke to every single patient in that ward. The English test team. It was good.

You moved a lot in Australia. What was that like?

- 37:30 After Heidelberg, I went back to Concord for a while. Then I went to Wagga Wagga. That's a strange place. That was the - this is post-war then - the apprentices' training scheme: lads about 15, 16 and they were being taught trades
- 38:00 and things like that. And cooks too, that was nice. That was a lot of homesick boys. On the sick parade a lot of them had things, pretended they were ill, they just wanted someone to talk to (UNCLEAR). Homesick boys.
- 38:30 No, it was a happy station, Wagga Wagga. Then we got the measles epidemic. Then they all went down with the measles. We only had about 10 beds in the sick quarters. So we had to open one of the huts and put the people there and
- 39:00 just go down to see them. Unfortunately, at that same time as the boys got these red measles, then the laundry, the laundry was done by a local laundry, and that went on straight, not because of us. So all the washing, I told them they could only wear their trousers. No tops. I wasn't going to wash all those. So around us
- 39:30 we had a wire fence around the nurses' quarters; just two of us there. The senior sister was on leave too. So I was looking after the measles people and the laundry to be done. They only had bottom sheets. I can't remember how I worked it, but I could see all these piles and piles
- 40:00 of these trousers and we had to put them all on the wire fence all round the sisters' quarters there. Had to wash them in the bath and hang them up. You cope with these things. You do.

It's interesting with the upbringing you had where there was always somebody else to do the domestics.

Yes.

- 40:30 It's good. You shouldn't ask anyone to do a job if you're not prepared to do it yourself. You shouldn't. If you have to do it, you should be prepared to do it.
- 41:00 That was a funny time.

00:35 **What was it in Concord that you did not like?**

These huge nursing homes and these huge wards and that. I don't know, I wasn't very fond of Concord. If you see this film called All Saints, one thing that happened at Concord, they were losing a lot of their laundry.

01:00 They couldn't find out who was taking the laundry. It was checked and double-checked. Then it turned out the laundry, it was quite near the river, and they were putting them on a boat and taken down by boat. They were caught stealing the laundry.

How long were you in Concord

01:30 **all up?**

I was there three times. I can't remember how many years it was, probably 6 or 7 months. Honestly I cannot remember. It was months, not years.

You talked about the skin ward.

I was in skin and the

02:00 psych ward and the officers' ward. I was there.

We didn't say much about the officers' ward.

A lot of them were injured pilots. Have you started? Oh I'm sorry, I didn't hear that. I told you about

02:30 when I knocked the big metal screen and a lot of them hopped under the bed. There were mainly a lot of battle casualties and other medical complaints. A lot with missing arms and legs. We had a lot of burns.

03:00 Mainly battle casualties they were. Pilots and navigators and people like that. They were all very brave boys.

What could you do in terms of just talking to them and being with them that was able to bring them comfort?

You can always listen to their stories. They did enjoy

03:30 telling you how their injuries were. They used to talk about their squadron lives in England. They tell you so much. But you never wanted to make them feel sorry for themselves. That was not a good thing to do. You just kept them very occupied, well looked after from a nursing point of view.

04:00 Well fed. And they had the company of each other. They had lots of stories they could swap. Always had lots of books for them to read.

Did you get a reasonable picture of what life was like for them in the air force, in combat for example?

Yes, you would. It was a busy life they had.

04:30 I think the ones who had been in England, I think it was go, go, go. They more or less came back from one sortie, barely reporting in that one before they were off for another one. I think they made wonderful friends there. I think that comradeship

05:00 that they have. Things like that. I think the tougher a job is, the closer you become to the people you work with. They were able to help each other in the war. There was always lots of laughter. I remember meeting one of the boys

05:30 a couple of years after. I said, "You were just one of the most perfect patients. You never made a complaint or anything. I know you were supposed to drink a lot of some for your kidney thing," I can't remember what, "and you had no trouble at all." He said, "I had a case of gin under my bed. I used to put a drop of that into my lolly water I had to drink. No wonder I was a quiet

06:00 thing. I was stoned all the time." I didn't know that. There was another one in that ward who was very keen to be in parliament. He used to hold forth all the rights and wrongs about the world if you wanted to listen to it. Had his legs strung up, he couldn't get away. He just kept on talking. I think he did get into parliament too.

06:30 **Did the men pine for physical comfort as well, in terms of mothering?**

If a person looked frightened and nervous, yes, I'd hold their hand. You don't want to molly-coddle them at all, but if the ones, and some of them were so young. It

07:00 didn't hurt if you held their hand or just time to listen. Yes. A lot of them were just such babies really. Some of them were 18-19 when they went to war. Some of them were a long way from home. You wouldn't want to

07:30 soften them up, but it didn't hurt to hold their hand. You can always tell from a person's eyes what's wrong, if it's frightened or nervous. Yes, you can. I think it gave a bit of extra comfort holding their hand. It doesn't hurt.

Would there be words to go with that?

08:00 Just keep talking. Doesn't matter what you talk about or you may ask them about their families, "It won't be long before you get to them again." And tell them they'd been brave in a nice way. But not to soften them, just to listen and just to know

08:30 that you were there to help them.

You spoke about you learned a bit about the way of the world. The orderly on the floor with the...

Oh yes.

You said you were quite innocent at the time.

Yes, we were. Things like that weren't talked about. We were.

09:00 **With these men who had been away, in some cases, these nurses would have been the first women they'd seen in a long time.**

Yes.

How did that present itself?

They had the greatest respect

09:30 of the nurses. You never, ever had trouble. Never. With your white veil and your starchy white uniform. I was never given any disrespect at all by any of the patients ever, ever. Or a few other different stations and things, no, they really respect their nurses. You never heard them utter swearwords. Not in front of the nurses.

10:00 No, never. I don't know what it's like now, when they're all in together and that sort of thing. I've no idea. In those days, no, they had a great respect for the nurses.

How important was the uniform?

I think it gives you that authority and you looked like a nurse. These days you go to hospital, you don't know

10:30 who's who. They're all calling each other by their Christian names. You have to have the same barrier between the patient and the nurse. I think it was most important, but not all in together, 'Bob' and 'Charlie' and 'Bill' and that sort of thing. You lose that respect for the patient and the patient for the nurse.

11:00 I think it's a great pity that they ever got rid of the uniform and also the veil. The same as the nuns used to go around with proper uniform; the Salvation Army uniform, who could go anywhere, and the pubs collecting and that sort of thing with their straw bonnets and looking like the Salvation Army. They were given great respect. They could go anywhere. People respected

11:30 that.

Can you describe the uniform and the veil?

That we had? During wartime we had a beige sort of khaki beige uniform, black buttons, just turned back and a collar, beige stockings and

12:00 black shoes and navy blue cape that went underneath your collar and a white veil. You had epaulettes there with your rank on that. When it came to peacetime, we changed to white uniforms and white stockings

12:30 and white shoes. It changed to that in peacetime, the air force.

We talked about various problems the men had, shell shock, we now call it post-traumatic stress disorder.

I know. They always said,

13:00 "There's no such thing as shell shock." I saw this lack of moral fibre. You can't help it if that's the way you're made. It's not their fault; it's just unfortunate. Some people I think they used to say were cowards in the First World War, they were shot. You can't blame them, but they always said, "There's no such thing as

13:30 shell shock." Some people have not got the ability to stand up to different situations. Some people can cope with anything, and some people can't, they crumble. You can't say, "You should do this," or, "You

14:00 should do that," if they physically or mentally can't do it. I think that's why in Vietnam things went so wrong after, because they hadn't found out too much about the people before they were sent there. Their button was taken out of the barrel and they went. They should have found out more if they could stand up

14:30 with this sort of warfare or not. The other thing with Vietnam is that, instead of having, I was talking about Bradfield Park, and there was Ascot Vale here, when the boys came back they were sent there and they'd have two weeks where they were giving back their uniforms and being demobbed [demobilised] and that. They'd have at least a couple of weeks

15:00 until they were demobbed, then they'd go home. In that war, they were just given a movement order and flown back and straight home. It's evil; it's wicked. No time to unwind.

You'd think they'd have learned something from the repatriation process you were involved in?

15:30 The fit people were just sent straight home. They still should have time to unwind, not just straight from the battlefields back into their own homes. No wonder there were so many upsets after. Cruel things.

Talking about LMF [Lack of Moral Fibre], was that a phrase the analysts were using as well in the psych ward?

16:00 It was used right through: Low Moral Fibre.

Do you recall how the analysts would deal with those particular cases?

A lot of them weren't any use to the air force again. They'd be discharged after that. Yes. Some people can cope with things. It's no good doing a job if you're

16:30 not fit to do it. That's civilian life or anywhere else. If you haven't got the ability to cope with a job you have to do, it was no good to try, see.

Those men in particular, were they treated any differently to other patients?

No.

17:00 Everyone was treated the same. You didn't say 'a weak sort of person'. No, you treated everyone the same. It's just that it's all very well you have a broken leg or a broken arm or a burn from an accident, but the most difficult things to cope with is mental treatment,

17:30 because people can't see it. If it's a broken leg, "Oh, isn't that dreadful." When it comes all from the mind and people don't get enough sympathy with that, but it's a very real thing.

How were those men treated medically and clinically?

I think a lot

18:00 were through medications and to keep them busy, keep their mind off their problems and just kept them physically and mentally busy while they were there. Then you always made sure they had a good night's sleep so they could wake up ready for the next day and very good food to keep them up physically.

18:30 Most of them - very few of them went back into the air force - most of them would be discharged after that. You can't blame them. They were in a job they weren't able to do. You can't feel sorry for them; you can't blame them.

You said there was a ward for men who had

19:00 **inflicted injuries upon themselves.**

What?

Some men who may have self-inflicted injuries.

I didn't say that. No.

OK. We have heard stories about men who...

19:30 Yes. No, I haven't seen that. I have heard of it. So, to get out of what they had to do. I have heard of it, I've never seen that. I don't know anything about it.

You said there had to be a barrier between the nurses and the patients and the nurses and the doctors. Was that always the case or were there times

20:00 **when friendships would be formed?**

I suppose you could, but I mean, when you're a professional person like that, you try to keep your distance. I don't think it'd do your work if you became too friendly with your patients. We do have stories of nurses

- 20:30 marrying their patients, I know a lot of them who did, but it doesn't happen often. There was one person who came down, a pilot, in Lord Howe Island. One of the air force sisters had to fly over to get him to bring him back to the mainland. They married. I think he felt
- 21:00 obliged that she had rescued him. I think they divorced a few days after. But that was one person, a nurse marrying. I remember another girl and this lad was completely blind. I think something had exploded over his face. He had black marks all over that. She married him and looked
- 21:30 after him. I don't think there were very many married them. They married other people on the squadron and that sort of thing, but there weren't many cases where the nurses married their patients.

During Bradfield Park or Concord, Townsville, the whole staff was working tirelessly, that was your lives, it was all consuming.

I

- 22:00 think you had this feeling you wanted to work so hard to get every bit that you did that might help the war. Everyone was working to try to finish the war. You knew you were doing something worthwhile. You'd work hard and you
- 22:30 enjoyed it. You think that even the little bit that you make can contribute. It might be the bit that helps.

We were talking about the navy girls. Tell us about that. That was in Concord wasn't it?

It was at

- 23:00 Concord, yes. The English navy girls came and they were going to stay at Concord. I think it was until their ship came back. We had them there for two or three weeks. We were there. They had a look at our own wards that they were rostered to help there. It was more or less a rest for them until their
- 23:30 own ship came. We thought, "Oh, we must show them Sydney, the harbour and this and that." Whoever had a day off, we'd say, "We'll take you girls." Give them a nice day to have a look at Sydney. They didn't want to go. They had been so starved for ice creams and bananas, they'd go down the corner shop at Concord or Strathfield and come back with loads of
- 24:00 bananas and loads of ice cream and sitting in our lovely sitting room eating bananas and ice cream. They were quite happy to do that, and they'd write letters home. They weren't very interested in having a look at Sydney, which was a pity.

Sounds like some of the backpackers we get today.

Yes.

How did that make you feel? Before the war Australia felt

- 24:30 **aligned with the mother country [England]. When you came into contact with the English girls, there was a cultural difference.**

I think that love of the Motherland was very one-sided. I don't think the English had the same feeling about the colonies as they called them. There

- 25:00 were so many of them, weren't there? I think they think a lot more of Australia and Canada and those places now, but I think they rather look down on the colonies and the Australians. Even when I went in the 50s, you said you were Australian, they
- 25:30 look sideways. Very condescending. Then they realise you're all right.

How could you combat that?

I just think, "Silly old things, they don't know better," that's all. I'd never say anything. Although, I must say, when I was doing this course at Brompton and

- 26:00 I did a bit of private nursing in the meantime if I wasn't tripping around Europe and that sort of thing. When it came to private nursing, from the co-op [cooperative] that I belonged to, people would ask for Australian nurses because they thought they were better, yes. The London clinic, which is one of the biggest hospitals in Harley Street, almost staffed by Australian nurses.
- 26:30 I know when I went there first and I was looking after a Jewish man in the London clinic. It was right in the middle of London and the walls and the windowsills were full of dust. This is a surgical case. I didn't want any infection. The first thing I did when I came - I was living in a little flat in Kensington - I brought all my dusters
- 27:00 in and I washed down all the walls. I did all the windowsills, sorted everything. Before, it was full of smog and stuff. This man said, "Are the nurses supposed to do that?" I said, "Nurses want to have nice, clean places around their patients." He said, "No one else has done that." I said, "It's high time they did."

27:30 It doesn't matter what you do providing you do it well. Those open wounds that you've got there. I don't want any smog and stuff into that." It was most extraordinary. The other thing, I went to St Charles in Ladbroke Grove. I was in the out patients there. Again,

28:00 it was so sooty. I washed out the walls. Then all the ancillary people went off on strike because I was doing a job that wasn't supposed to be done by the nurse. Trouble.

You were in Concord and Townsville, and in between you were in Bradfield

28:30 **Park?**

I was in Concord three times. Concord, Bradfield Park, from Bradfield Park I was doing relief work and went to Cootamundra and Temora, back to Concord as relief for someone having leave. From there I went to this course, which was medical evacuation work.

Was there a little

29:00 **train?**

Yes, in Cootamundra. We always had 1st Class and had sleepers. This was the first time I was going to relieve one of these nurses. We had a lot of these what we called "single sister units," where you had your sick quarters and you ran it. Often you didn't have a doctor. They were flying stations. I was going up

29:30 to relieve this other sister. The train was derailed on the way there. I was in a sleeper and I ended up being pitched out of my bed and standing on my head (UNCLEAR). Everyone had to get out of the train. It was about 2 in the morning. Wait there. Only one person got a broken ankle. Apart from that it was all right.

30:00 Then we had to wait for a few hours until one train came up from Melbourne, the other one came from Sydney. It was decamped and sent back. The only unfortunate thing, by the time I got to the Cootamundra air force station, the other sister had gone, so there was no takeover from her. Never having been on a flying station like that,

30:30 I just had to find out what to do.

Tell us more about that.

You had a sick parade first thing in the morning, then you'd always treat what you could. If there wasn't a doctor there, they normally had the use of the local doctor. So you achieved what you could,

31:00 or if they didn't have any treatments, send them back to work. If there was something you couldn't cope with, you'd get the local doctor to see them.

At what point would you make that decision?

Just by your knowledge of what was important and which wasn't, what you could treat and what you couldn't.

31:30 **Give an example where you could do some work that was bordering on what the doctor should be doing. To what extent would you be able to help?**

Sometimes they would have a footy accident or something like that, sprained an ankle, and if you could just bind it up

32:00 or else you'd need to X-ray or, it was just that. Or someone with a very high temperature, you get to know if it's more serious than you really could cope with. You have to have, even penicillin and that sort of thing had

32:30 to be ordered by a doctor. If you were ordering aspirins and things like that, you could look after and give them, but some things had to be ordered by a doctor. A nurse isn't allowed to give them.

That was the single sister ward?

Yes. They had station sick quarters.

33:00 Then at the flying station you always had one ward all ready for a crash ward. It was all necessary if you had to splint up their legs or something.

A crash ward?

If there has been a crash. Someone would have all the things ready there in case there has been a crash.

Was there ever?

Not when I was

33:30 there. It could happen. We had all the stuff there that was needed. Flying accidents.

The medical evacuation training you undertook, did you know you would be heading north after that?

Yes. We were supposed to be taking over

34:00 with the Number 1 MEATU. The war was almost at the point of finishing and we knew we were going to do the POWs and any other casualties that were still left over. We were supposed to go up to relieve the first ones that went and they were supposed to come south. But when, since they'd been there right in the start they wanted to be there in the finish,

34:30 they would not come down. I didn't blame them. Everything was getting so exciting there with the war finishing and the POWs ready to be brought down. They were supposed to be at more or less a rest. They were supposed to come down to Townsville and we were supposed to go up to Nadzab and up further north. But they wouldn't move. I didn't blame them at all; all the excitement there. So we were stationed

35:00 at Townsville. So the other ones were brought to us and then we brought the patients to their own home states.

How did you feel about missing the opportunity to go to Nadzab?

Yes. I think it was more exciting. Get out of your own country. I don't blame them at all. The CO

35:30 there, he was all for them up there. So he stayed with them until that job was done.

How long were you in Townsville?

About a year. I've still got my logbook there, all the trips I made. Then I was at

36:00 Garbutt in Townsville and then Pat Kennedy, another girl, and I were down at Archerfield, which is near Brisbane. Again, with the hops from Townsville to Brisbane, Brisbane to, like a shuttle service, we were doing, a lot of the girls were bringing people down to Brisbane and then we'd take the others from Brisbane further down.

36:30 We had this one hut. It was an airman's hut, about 20 beds, 10 showers, 10 latrines, some of them stand up ones, and just for us. Then we had our meal at the officers' mess. Not very comfortable but we were

37:00 barely there; we were just flying backwards and forwards all the time.

A lot of flying at this point?

Yes. Bringing the POWs back, yes, and a few battle casualties which were left over.

What planes were you flying on?

Dakotas. DC-4s and 3s.

What was that experience like?

37:30 They were safe; they were solid. They weren't pressurised, not like the new ones. So you had to carry your oxygen with you if you needed that. They wouldn't go over 10,000 feet. You'd need oxygen after that.

38:00 Very comfortable. They always said that if it came down in the sea it would float for 8 minutes and took 8 minutes to take your dinghy and never inflate it in the plane, because you had to get out of the door. It never happened, so I didn't. They had a lot of scares,

38:30 had to force landings, they think they lost an engine and that sort of thing. Had a few scares: a nasty one when we were coming down to Sydney and they couldn't get the tyres down. We'd go up and around and round and round till they'd have to shake them down. That's all written up in the newspapers

39:00 in Sydney. A few scares like that. It was under weather, rocking up and down.

What's going through your mind when these scares are happening?

I always think the pilot wants to get down. I was not scared. At times, you were a bit apprehensive, but I always think

39:30 the pilot, he wants to get down. You had tremendous faith in them. At times, you were apprehensive. One nasty thing that happened with, again my friend Joan is not alive, she had brought this Dutch major, who again was a psych person, down from

40:00 Morotai down to Townsville. He said he'd be all right - we often had to restrain some of these people - said he didn't really get restrained at all, but he said, "Just watch him. If I were you, it's much more

comfortable if he's not restrained." We took off and flying

40:30 and he said, "Could I have some water?" So I went and got a glass of water from the paper cup in those days. Then he stood up and ran past me. I went over. The navigator was just around the corner of the door there. He had the stuff to see that this Dutch major made his way to open the door in the back and me knocked out there. It was nasty

41:00 business.

This was in mid air?

Yes. He pulled this Dutch major back and he restrained him, got him sorted out and got me sorted out and had a sore head. But apart from that, I think that's the only nasty bit I had. But you could hear the navigator

41:30 (UNCLEAR), yes.

What were you transporting him to?

It'd be from Townsville to Brisbane. Most of the Dutch people, we took as far as Brisbane. Then from there I think they flew them back with Dutch planes. A tremendous lot of Dutch civilians, internees. They were from

42:00 Jakarta and had been interned.

Tape 6

00:38 **You were talking about Joan, your good mate who you went into the air force with. Were you working side by side?**

No, she was up at Morotai. Joan and I started our nursing training together at Alfred. Then we

01:00 joined the air force at the same time. Then we were both chosen to do this medical evacuation work. Very few of us were. We were very pleased that we were chosen. Again, I got in the service the year before and she got into MEATU about a month before me. So she got up to Morotai. I was in Townsville. It was the luck of the draw. We

01:30 were both lucky to be in that unit. It was very sought after. It was the cream of the cream to get into. It was lovely. Joan would often have trips down to Townsville with her patients. Then we'd meet up there. She was a great girl. Another thing, she was a very good swimmer.

02:00 After the war, she was up there, they had inter-service swimming championships and things like that, sports things. She was a very good swimmer and diver. With this inter-service army, navy, air force swimming things, Joan got three men's watches; all these different events that she won.

02:30 **She was bringing the POWs back?**

Yes. As well as the sick and wounded, battle casualties, she'd take them to Townsville and she'd go straight to Morotai, then we'd go to the hospitals further down. We'd get them home again.

How much of your time

03:00 **was spent in the air?**

About 8 hours. It depends on where you were going.

How frequently?

Every day. It was daily at that time. There was so much to do. It was daily, the flight.

You described your quarters

03:30 **in Archerfield.**

Yes, in Townsville, the ones there, it was like a two-storey hut. We were on the bottom floor. It was just a hut and no windows. You sort of pushed out the window, or the bit of

04:00 board to open that and wooden floors, concrete floors; funny old stretchers with one green locker and one chair by your bed. That was our life. And you had a big green trunk. You put everything in that. One shower for all of them and about 10 of us in the same room.

04:30 And mosquito nets. Very primitive, but we didn't mind. Upstairs was the sick quarters, which was nothing to do with us. They had a separate staff for that sick quarters.

The men were being brought in

05:00 **from Morotai?**

There were huts that they bedded down overnight. Sometimes they were brought straight. Depended on the time or the weather. Normally they would stay overnight. We'd always go to the huts and have a word with them and with the person who brought them down. You'd go over who was

05:30 travelling well and who wasn't.

Who would decide who would be able to travel and who wouldn't?

The nurse would tell you if they were travelling well. It was just the nurses and the orderlies. We always had an orderly to help us. We did all the putting the litter up there.

06:00 They had the stretchers and the, what were they; I don't know how to describe it. We had all our loading equipment in the planes and the canvas stretchers and ropes. You slotted them through there. You

06:30 did all that yourself. We were strong.

You were caring both on the ground and in the plane. Was there a team that looked after the men on the ground while you did the planes?

When they were in the huts

07:00 between flights, we would see them the night before, we'd have our manifest of, list of the people you were going to carry, and overnight they'd be looked after from the sick quarters. Then the ambulance people would bring them to the plane. Then you'd load the plane. We'd have our sandwiches.

07:30 Generally the Red Cross would have a whole bundle of sandwiches for us. We had big thermoses of tea. Sometimes we'd have to cut out own. Given a loaf of bread and some butter and tins of sardine or spaghetti and you'd make the sandwiches there.

How many on the plane?

24, oh, the crew,

08:00 the two pilots, the senior one and junior one, then the navigator and the observer, about 4; no doubt have either one or two orderlies.

It would be you, one or two orderlies and how many patients?

08:30 About 24. With the stretcher cases, they normally have about 8 and the other ones would be what we called walking wounded. They tried to stagger the load: only about 8 stretchers, sometimes more, but generally about 8. Then the others would be

09:00 walking in those little tin seats. No straps or anything like that. They were allowed to smoke. You're not allowed to smoke these days. Then in the back of the plane there was kerosene tin. That was the lavatory at the end of the plane. It was very primitive,

09:30 but happy.

What were your general responsibilities on those flights?

Looking after them as if you were looking after them in the ward. Make certain they had any medication they needed or fluids and whatever. They might have transfusions or

10:00 the saline drips. You keep an eye on those just as if you were in a ward, but it's on the plane. If they were mentally disturbed, you had to restrain them.

Who would do the restraining?

I would. No, you have these straps and things.

10:30 Make them comfortable.

You had to be strong.

We were strong. We had the actual loading we did. Putting these wooden poles through these canvas strips and belting them up and, yes.

Is that what kept you fit, or did you do exercise?

No

11:00 we were just fit people. Young. Keen. Lovely work.

How well prepared were you in case of an emergency during the flights?

In what way?

11:30 **If someone were to haemorrhage. If there was a medical problem that arose on the flight, could you deal with...?**

Yes, we had very good little wooden medical kits, yes. We could cope with anything.

Can you recall times where

12:00 **a mistake was made and someone was shipped when they shouldn't have been?**

No. I didn't have any excitement like that. Others could have, but I didn't. We used to feed them and have lots of tea and stuff with them. They always had their ciggies [cigarettes].

12:30 That's when I first started smoking then, when the people who couldn't use their arms or something, light cigarettes for them, I thought this was rather nice. Yes. I was well aware. Lighting cigarettes for POWs. I smoked for years after that. Don't smoke now, but I did. Soothing.

13:00 **How prepared were the POWs to talk about their experiences?**

I don't think they talked much about it. I think they were so relieved to be on their way home. They were very keen to get news of Australia,

13:30 what has happened, because they hadn't had any newspapers or anything like that. They just loved to hear about who won the Melbourne Cup and things like that, what's happening, just general news. I think that was the main thing. They were very keen to hear if you had news from

14:00 home. Just wondering what was going to await them when they, would it be just the same? When I had this march, the 50 years, and the schoolchildren were taught so much about the Japanese war and our war and the way the Japanese had treated our own boys. When we had

14:30 that march through the city, these little schoolchildren would come up to you and say, "Thankyou for giving us our freedom." I thought to myself, really what would have happened if Australia hadn't got their freedom? We'd all be dead, wouldn't we? The Japanese wouldn't have shown any mercy if they'd overrun Australia, would they?

Is that how

15:00 **you felt at the time as well?**

When these kiddies, I never thought for one minute we'd be beaten. You never, ever think that. You always think you'll win. You always think that. But when these school children were saying, "Thankyou for our freedom," how awful if we hadn't had our freedom. How would the Japanese have treated us? What

15:30 Australia would be like. It's hard to think, isn't it? When they said that, the tears would come into my eyes. I thought, "How dreadful." It would have been, I think we would all have been killed or raped or pillaged or what have you. Here these kiddies were saying, "I'm glad they did get our freedom."

16:00 The whole time you never, ever thought that you wouldn't win. You wouldn't think that. It was a close call all the way through and I think the Battle of the Coral Sea, that was the big turning point.

The men must have seen you as

16:30 **angels really.**

When they had been locked up for so long, I think to talk to someone from home, they loved it. It was wonderful. When they could hear about things that were happening back in Australia and to realise they were actually on their way

17:00 to come back. And to reassure them, the Red Cross would have been in contact with their next of kin. They were always given wonderful welcomes.

When you took these men south, were there families?

Yes. A lot of them were on the airport.

17:30 Some of them were advised to be at Concord: depending on the condition of the people, it was best that they went straight to hospital. I can't remember how it worked, but I know some of the next of kin would be asked to be in the hospital. Some said, "Yes, you can come," but most of them were taken straight to a hospital.

18:00 But there was always a premier or a governor to welcome them back, "Glad to see you back, boys." Very emotional. Very, very wonderful to see them back again. I felt very privileged to do that work.

18:30 **You were based in Townsville?**

Yes, and Archerfield.

That was for about a year?

Yes.

Were you stationed there before the war was officially over?

No. It was more or less after it finished.

Where were you when the

19:00 **A-bombs were dropped in Japan?**

I must have been in Bradfield I suppose; either Bradfield or else at Arundel doing this course. I cannot remember.

You told us about VP Day and the patients who went to

19:30 **the celebrations.**

That was good. It's very hard to think back. I must have been doing relief work at Concord

20:00 to remember that. The next thing was to Arundel to do the training to go up to do, that's the way it must have worked. They just left. I didn't blame them.

The men wanted to know about the Melbourne Cup. What other things were they hungry to know?

20:30 Some of them were asking about Gordon Bennett, "Where is he?" I said, "He was court-martialled." "But why?" they said. He left; there was so much fuss about that, he just run away. The boys there, they said, "We thought he

21:00 went down to tell down south exactly what's happening to us." Horrified to think they'd thought that he'd run away. They didn't think of it that way. They thought he'd come down so as he could do as much as he could for them up there.

So they held him in high esteem?

Yes, they did.

21:30 Horrified to think he'd been badly treated. Horrified. And they wanted to know who was running the country and just everyday things. What the weather was like and everyday things.

You told us about the

22:00 **correct altitude to fly. How did you work that out?**

This is the sort of thing we were taught when we did our course at Arundel about looking after people in flight. If a person has trouble with his chest or heart, it was best at a certain height.

22:30 If they're broken limbs, legs and whatever, where they had a smoother ride, it's best that. I can't remember if it was smoother up there or smoother down there, but I can't remember how it worked, that sort of thing.

Would you be in

23:00 **communication with the flight crew?**

You just walked through the door. The navigator was just around the corner.

If there were guys with broken legs and there was turbulence, the pilot knew what to do?

We'd tell them the sort of patients we had, yes. I remember once when

23:30 it was so rough. It was after the war and there was one little air force girl and she was coming down to be married. She had her trousseau and everything there. She'd been stitching while I was in Brisbane or wherever it was. What we had learned was, with our own personal kit, overnight bag, we always put it up near the pilot because

24:00 if it became too disturbed, if things were thrown out, the things up by the pilot were not thrown out so quickly. I remember this time, everything was being thrown out, trying to get rid of the weight. This little girl with the trousseau while

24:30 everyone else's stuff went, trying to make the plane lighter. Those sorts of things happened.

Did you tell me there was an occasion where you lost an engine on the way?

Yes. You could always come in with a wing and a prayer. We often had to land

25:00 in small airfields, get engineers and people put things right again. It did happen, but I don't know, I never felt nervous. You just thought that they would get you there. Some of the little airstrips were so primitive. Unless

25:30 you wanted to spend a penny, you had to have someone guard your hut while you went it. They looked after us very well. Cloncurry, do you remember, that's a great place after the war for smuggling; the people coming down from Japan with their pearls and their silk stockings and things. It was

26:00 a smuggling place.

Aussies bringing back?

Yes, they did. Of the artificial pearls and that sort of thing and nylon stockings. Then there were people trying to avoid customs. Cloncurry was a great place for that. The very

26:30 last plane that came back from Japan, after the POWs and things, when they came to Darwin and the CO was flying this plane, Duff his name was, and the customs people thought they would have a look at this one. The whole of the plane was full. You know how they have lots of wires

27:00 and things around? There were pearls and things round these wires. They had their own wires they'd put there. The chocks they put under the wheels, that was full of pearls and stockings and things. The whole plane was dismantled. There was a lot of that going on.

You landed at Cloncurry other times?

No, not often, but

27:30 sometimes if we had engine trouble or something like that. No, I wasn't in this smuggling ring, no. I wasn't. I wish I had been.

Were the POWs bringing back stuff with them?

No, they had nothing.

28:00 **You were with the air force?**

Yes, 36 Squadron.

It was the POWs and also the wounded?

And a lot of Dutch civilian internees.

28:30 **You talked about your overnight kit. Was that your own personal luggage?**

Yes. You'd have your overnight kit in case you had to stay overnight, and a toothbrush and whatever. Then you'd have your oxygen, your medical kit and your thing for your sandwiches.

29:00 Yes, your own overnight kit, your oxygen and your medical kit.

Can you recall some other airstrips where you had to land?

Mascot and

29:30 would be Essendon or Haberfield. It's all in my logbook.

Do you have a rough idea of how many flights you did?

It's all there.

A ballpark figure?

30:00 Hundreds. Not hundreds, about, I don't know. Many. Many, many, many. Yes. Only one way to take the people down and then your own trip back. You're sitting on cabbages or something like that.

They would be used as cargo?

Yes,

30:30 well, that's a thing. There was such a thing as the air ambulances, but we were not ambulances. We were not protected in any way with Geneva or Red Cross. It was a medical evacuation transport unit. So they came across this idea that those transport planes, when they had taken all the stuff up

31:00 north - it could be guns, it could be cabbages, it could be mail or extra armaments, anything like that - on the way back it could be used to bring the patients down. So in the way of Geneva, we were not protected in any way.

Because it wasn't solely for ambulance?

No, it was being

31:30 mainly used as transport taking stuff up to the north. Then they thought it was a good idea to make use of those planes to bring the patients down. Good idea. No safety for us or the patients. We weren't protected in any way.

Parachutes?

No, no.

32:00 Two of the girls crashed. The planes they were in crashed in New Guinea with their patients.

Do you remember hearing that news?

Yes. One Mary Craig and another girl called Shea.

32:30 One of them was completely missing with the patients. I think they found her 25 years after. The other one was taking off at Jacquinot Bay I think it was called, near Rabaul. That was crashed with the patients on takeoff. Two of the girls.

33:00 Nice girls.

You were involved with the unit until the last?

Yes, we flew until all the people had been brought back, then until they just needed the nurses. Then the very last ones, the

33:30 orderlies were last. The other people were just left there. They were the orderlies took the necessary, yes.

What can you remember of the end of that period?

It was hard work, but it was satisfying work. It was something that had to be done.

34:00 We were very sad when it finished, but the job had been done. It was just a few people had been left in hospital there and they didn't need much nursing care, but some had to be brought down after. But the orderlies

34:30 could do that. Quite frankly, a lot of them were VDs [Venereal Diseases]. Yes. They kept them up there until they were cured before. Obviously we didn't want to do them. The orderlies did those.

With VD, why were they kept in Townsville?

That was up further north. They kept them there till they were

35:00 cured and then brought them back.

That was for not having spread of VD in Australia?

Yes. Just to get them right.

What was next for you?

I went to Heidelberg then. I took over in the tuberculosis ward.

35:30 Then I had a quick trip back to Concord, then to Wagga and then the rocket range, Mallala, which I thoroughly enjoyed. It was all very top secret and that sort of thing. Everyone had to be security cleared to work there.

36:00 Again, it was sick quarters, just me and no doctor. There was a local doctor. He actually was a drug addict. I called him and said, "I had so many in the sick parade and I'm looking after them, but a couple of them I'd like you to see." He said, "All right, I'll be there at 10 o'clock." He would come at about 2 o'clock in the morning 3 days later. It was

36:30 quite awful. At that stage, I'd had to send them on to Adelaide Hospital. The whole thing, I think, was quite awful. Here were these boys doing these high bomb ballistic trials, and they weren't any pressurised planes. They would have you take these special high trials,

37:00 they didn't have the proper uniform or anything. They'd ask me, "Could I have the silk stockings," or anything they could wear under their gear. I used to get all my friends to send worn out stockings and things for the boys. Before they did these trials, stockings on there and up their legs. That seems so awful. This was the high top secret trials

37:30 they were doing then and not properly equipped. Also, anything happened, well, something did happen too and not a doctor on the station. Then they'd have their night flights. They always had to have an ambulance and a medical person, all written down in law, when they were doing night flying. So there

38:00 I was. I'd go down to this airstrip in the ambulance with the orderly and myself. If anything had really gone wrong - nothing did crash. But sometimes, if the orderly couldn't be there, I didn't have a car then, I barely could learn how to drive, I'd take this rotten old ambulance,

- 38:30 steer it down to the airstrip and sit there night after night, hour after hour. I thought, "If there was an emergency, would I get there quickly?" There was a lot of hit and miss.
- You were the ambulance salvage team?**
- I had a year and a half of it.
- What was the nature of the work there?**
- 39:00 It was quite a big station. They were doing all these special trials. Sir William Penny would fly over with his Blue Streak [long-range rocket] and that sort of thing. They were doing all these trials. Then, from Mallala, I was in charge of Mallala and also Woomera, used to fly up there and stay at the sick quarters there. If there
- 39:30 was any medical evacuation from there, I'd have to fly up, any bring them back. A lot at a (UNCLEAR). This wretched civilian doctor who was...and in the end he committed suicide. I had to go to his house to find him strung up, I'm sorry. This is the person who was supposed to help me.
- 40:00 Extraordinary. This is the top secret, most important bit that was being done there: only one sister to look after that, with a drugged civilian doctor who was never there. Then he tricked me once. I
- 40:30 couldn't leave the station in case he came. I knew some people who lived in Adelaide. I used to love going down to see them. If I went to see them, I had to give the orderly officer the key in case the doctor came and said, "I want some drugs." It'd be for himself, not, so it was very difficult for the sergeant orderly to
- 41:00 tell the doctor, "You can't have them." So the orderly officer had to have the key if anything was needed so that he could overrule the doctor. The whole thing was ghastly. Once doctor, I won't say his name, came and said there had been an outbreak of food poisoning and, "Have you got any bismuth and opium." I said I didn't think
- 41:30 of this. It was this big, white, chalky medicine. If you had tummies upset, you'd give them an ounce of this bismuth. I said, "Of course, you can have one of those." Silly me, I forgot it was bismuth and opium, opiate. So I gave him a Winchester [half-gallon bottle]
- 42:00 of that. Then I realised, oh silly.

Tape 7

- 00:39 **There's more about Woomera. You were there 18 months?**
- It was a very happy place. It was very isolated, but it was a happy station. As I said, it was all security stuff. We
- 01:00 weren't supposed to talk about the work we were doing. I couldn't even have told them anyway. You know, when Sir William Penny came through with his Blue Streak, they brought two planes. One plane had the Blue Streak and him in it. The other one just engineers and people like that. When they landed at
- 01:30 Woomera, they had to have all the windows closed. When they landed, Mr Penny stood by the one that didn't have the Blue Streak in and dressed up as an engineer and the goody was just left as if it was unguarded.
- 02:00 Just to be clever.
- What was the Blue Streak?**
- It was one of these long-range weapons they were trying to do tests with. They were doing all sorts of tests there.
- What sort of problems, what kind of problems?**
- 02:30 What patients I looked after? They were just all these air force people: coughs and colds and broken bones. A lot of young boys had their motorbikes and they'd have motorbike accidents. I didn't have anything very serious there.
- 03:00 If there was anything that I couldn't cope with, I would send them down to the Adelaide Hospital: an appendix and that sort of thing. It was mainly just everyday illnesses, which their mothers could have looked after. We had a lot of these skin grazes and things. A lot of the motorbike boys there. It was air force people. They were

- 03:30 always getting scrapes and bangs and that sort of thing. Then we had the pilots. They'd have to have their six-monthly medical. Then there was one there who was due for his six-monthly medical test where you had to test their hearing and their
- 04:00 eyes and things like that. This man, I had the eye test up on the wall. He closed his eyes and said it right through. Got the Ishihara book with dots and things for them. He knew them all without even pretending to look. Then he said that, "I was an eye person before I joined the air force." He had been
- 04:30 the governor-general's pilot. He said he was totally colour-blind. But, he said, he knew if the thing was red it should be green. He'd gone right through his air force career, cos he knew all these tests and things. Extraordinary.

Had he flown?

Yes. The lot.

- 05:00 Totally colour-blind. But he said because all his eye work before the war, he knew exactly what to look for. When they did his six-monthly tests with his eyes, he knew what to say. A thing that looked red for me, it looked green with him, but he knew it was red. He'd been the governor-general's pilot.
- 05:30 Lots of funny things. Extraordinary, isn't it?

You must have become privy to confidential information. Did they tell you things?

Yes, they'd tell me. I'm a good listener. He was going through this test so quickly and he told me why. He said, "I fooled my way right through the air force

- 06:00 being totally colour-blind." He had never had an accident. That was all right. Another funny thing, the head of the medical people for the air force came on an inspection. He went right through the important bits there
- 06:30 with the CO. He had one of the normal officers' cloth caps, you know? He was going through a hangar and hit his head on the top of this steel hangar, it didn't even touch the cloth of that, but it sliced in his head. He was brought up to the sick quarters. The week before I had ordered some new needles.
- 07:00 I used to do my own stitching and that sort of thing and I needed some new ones. Here was the head of the medical directorate with this awful slash across there. I said, "Don't worry. Just lie down." I wouldn't dare to see this crowbar I had to use to sew him up. I had to shave a bit of his hair around there. This huge crowbar. I was expecting the new needles
- 07:30 to follow in a day, but that was all I was left with. Sewing up the head of the medical thing with. Yet, I had a lovely letter back from him after that it healed so beautifully and beautiful work. I wouldn't let him see what I was using. Hadn't got my resupply in.

You were out there in the desert.

- 08:00 **Very dry.**

Yes, very, very dry.

What were your impressions?

Absolute dump of a place. Also, my quarters, the sick quarters was on the top of that. I had a bathroom and a bedroom at the back of the sick quarters. Nothing separate. I was just

- 08:30 there all the time. The whole thing was so primitive, very primitive.

Did you need to keep patients there overnight?

Yes. I'd have an orderly on duty. I'd have to get up at 6 o'clock in the morning because 4 o'clock every afternoon the red dust would come through. Every afternoon at 4 o'clock this dust would come through.

- 09:00 I'd have to get up at 6 and get a duster going through all the windowsills to get the dust off that. Then I'd sweep all the dust out and then the rotor polisher there and then all ready for the sick parade at 7 o'clock. Every morning you'd have to start that.

- 09:30 **They couldn't give you a cleaner?**

No, we didn't have cleaners. It's amazing what you...you just did all those things. I didn't have very many patients there; a few, but not very many.

They were testing high-powered weapons?

- 10:00 Yes, they were.

Were there accidents?

No, this time they ran out of oxygen they had this pilot who was a very good pilot. He had this huge

bomber thing. They had from 6,000 feet down to 600 feet because they'd lost their oxygen. They all came out with black faces. Dreadful. Some of them had to go straight to Adelaide

10:30 Hospital. One of them wouldn't go. He was just sitting there drinking brandy for the rest of the evening, but wouldn't be helped. He was all right the next day. Mainly the tests they did were very good, but the equipment and the backup for it was primitive, it was dreadful.

11:00 **Did you treat any of those men on the flight?**

No, they went straight to the Adelaide Hospital. They were all right after that. It was a scary one. Then we had these spy people from long-range weapons, the English people from there

11:30 who had come, the security trials. Every time they managed to get through the guard and into the station. I think one came as a high general and the other one came was a chaplain. Just reasons. Bluffing why they should get there. They were putting little some sort of fizzers and thing on

12:00 places saying, "We bombed here, we bombed there," whatever they were using, but this man got his hand very badly burned. So the spy had to be brought up to the sick quarters because of these awful burns he had.

Where were the spies from?

This is from long-range weapons. It was just security checks to make certain that our security was good so that people

12:30 couldn't get through. They always seemed...

But they proved people could slip through.

Yes. They had a tennis court there. We could play tennis. It was very isolated. It was a happy station.

Did you go into town at all?

No,

13:00 at times yes, I would go occasionally, but it was very difficult because of this druggie doctor, in case he would try to get our drugs. I had a good station orderly officer. I had aunts and

13:30 an uncle who lived down in Victor Harbour I used to love - I only got there once - and another cousin who I used to like to visit. It was a very quick in and out again. Another funny thing happened there was we changed from our drab uniform to white uniforms, so they sent me through my uniforms and my stockings were all sent to me. Then I had to get my own

14:00 white shoes. So I put in a net saying could I have transport going in to Adelaide to get my white shoes. They knew I had a big foot. Then when this staff car came to take me there, I looked out from the sick quarters, one of these huge low-loaders and this driver, "Sergeant so and so come to get

14:30 matron for her shoes." I was laughing along. The CO had sent that, this low-loader for matron's shoes. Then it followed up with a staff car to send me there. It was a laugh a minute that place. I

15:00 got my shoes. I think with those places, they're so primitive, it went on with all sorts of nonsense.

You would have known the men on the base?

Oh yes. I used to have my meals at the officers' mess there. I'd nip across and have breakfast in the morning, was a (UNCLEAR) cook there.

15:30 All sorts of people would visit the place. Often the CO would bring the visitors to the sick quarters and I had a little kitchen there, a funny little room. We'd give them afternoon tea or morning tea there. You met all sorts of interesting people.

16:00 **People other than air force?**

A lot of army people, people from long-range weapons, I can't remember who they all were. They always used to get a cup of tea in the sick quarters.

You were the only woman there?

Yes. I used to do a lot of weaving and

16:30 all sorts of things. Keep myself busy. If you went, I'd often go over to the mess in the evening for my meal. I'd have one sherry, have my meal and go. Being one sister on duty all the time, if you had more than one drink they'd say, "Oh, the sister, she's supposed to be in

17:00 charge of the sick quarters, she's drinking all the time," that sort of thing. You had to be very careful not to be talked about. Also, you'd just go in there, have your meal and get out again. So you used to go on with a lot of loom weaving and painting and anything to keep occupied.

17:30 I wrote lots of letters to home.

What were the circumstances around you leaving Woomera?

Because I was posted. When the matron had seen what a primitive place it was, after that they would only have six months' posting and two people there because

18:00 it was too lonely.

Were you relieved to go?

Yes, I was. I'd had enough of it. It was the responsibility. You didn't mind it really, but when you had to go and find this doctor strung up, had hung himself, that wasn't so good for a laugh. It was so wrong that

18:30 you were given far too much responsibility. You had no one to back you up with things like that. No one. He wasn't dependable.

Where did you go next?

After that I went down to Laverton. I was there between two matrons there. So I was standing in as a matron

19:00 there. I was also, they were bringing in that all the air force sisters should be trained in medical evacuation work, so I was there to run the hospital, to train the new girls with the medical evacuation work. Also the WAAAF had been started again and they had a new intake of about 10 air force officers, women,

19:30 I had to give them a few lectures about hygiene and all those how to look after the girls underneath them. Hygiene lectures.

Why was there medical evacuation training? This was 1951.

Yes, I know. I think they thought all air force sisters

20:00 should be trained doing this. The next thing was the Korean War. It's gone on and on. Vietnam. If you were in the air force, you would be able to look after the people in the base hospitals and if casualties had to be brought back. They just thought it was best

20:30 that part of the training should be able to cope with medical evacuation. I loved doing that. I've got some nice pictures there. We used to show them how to load a plane and also we had to go to Point Cook and have dinghy training. We'd be

21:00 in the plane and thrown out, get in the dinghy and how to run with that and, very fun.

Thrown out of the moving plane?

Yes. Then we'd get into the dinghy. You'd put the dinghy out and then you'd get in and then you'd paddle away there.

Can you describe exactly what that meant?

21:30 We were all in the plane and then had to low flying. We'd throw the dinghy out and then we would all jump out of the plane ourselves and then into the dinghy and paddle away. In rescues.

Down at...?

Point Cook. So they had

22:00 lots of trips round with the looking after patients. It was really each other with how to load a plane and restraints and all the things that you might have to do. It was lovely work.

Where did those flights take place?

All around Point Cook.

Out over the bay?

22:30 Yes. I used to enjoy doing that. Then you had to tell them all about how to look after your patients in the air. I loved that. Then so many of the girls went up to Korea. They

23:00 put it to good use. They all have to do that these days.

You'd been trained yourself.

I'd been using it, yes. I could use the experience I had to pass it onto them. Lovely.

23:30 They were all the new intake had to be trained there.

Was that many intakes you trained?

I think we had a group of about 10. After that, all the nurses had been trained as well; all part of the training to be an air force sister. It was good.

- 24:00 I enjoyed Laverton. When it came to peacetime air force, I didn't enjoy so much. I enjoyed when there was action and things to do. Then, when you're looking after people who are so physically fit, and they didn't have the same feeling, the girls who were being brought in then. They'd expect to go on duty and be
- 24:30 off duty at four and off they went if there was work to do or not. They didn't have the same feeling as we had about their work. They didn't. It's hard to describe. We didn't have to watch the clock all the time.
- 25:00 They didn't have the same social graces and manners when it came to mess and life in the mess. Just a different type of person. I'm sure some of them were very good, but some of them weren't. I got fed up with it, so I decided I would leave, and went straight over to England and did this course.
- 25:30 Then the fun started.

What was the course you did in England?

It was at the Brompton Hospital, which is a chest hospital, all to do with tuberculosis, which was so very rife in England everywhere. I thought it was very much to specialise in one thing instead of trying to have refresher courses for all

- 26:00 branches of medicine. I think my little brain would take in all of that. I thought it was best to know everything about one thing instead of a little bit about lots of things so I specialised in that, which was fun. I was doing that in London at the Brompton Hospital; after that, at City Hospital at Edinburgh. I could see London and then up in Edinburgh it was lovely and a
- 26:30 complete change.

Why of all the specialist areas tuberculosis?

I think at Heidelberg it was such a worthwhile thing. They were getting all these new drugs and things; it could be cured. I thought it was an interesting thing to do.

TB [tuberculosis] was then a very dangerous...

It was rife, yes.

If you got it, more than likely you would

- 27:00 **die from it?**

In the old days, yes, but all the new drugs, you had every chance of surviving.

What was the 'no-hoppers club'?

Yes. This is when we were at Heidelberg. There were some Australian-Irish people and they were so brave. They knew they weren't going to survive

- 27:30 and they'd have their pyjamas and every lunchtime the orderlies took beer around to them. Everyone was allowed to have a pint of beer. The orderlies made certain a bit was left in the bottle, then they'd go to the linen room and finish off the rest. With the top of the bottle, they'd put on their pyjama jacket and put, I think it was a ha'penny
- 28:00 that would press in there. They'd have the beer-bottle top and they'd call themselves the 'no-hoppers club', the ones who jolly well knew they were going to die. They were brave. I still remember Bradley and Coglean, these wild Irish people but so funny, just full of fun - but they jolly well knew they were going to die.

- 28:30 **Were you there when they died?**

No, I wasn't.

They had TB?

Yes. All of these had been POWs. There were so many that had TB. Betty Jeffries, do you remember her? She was one of the POWs. She was in Heidelberg for many years, not in my ward, but she had TB and, you name it,

- 29:00 she had it. She was one of the sisters who had been taken (UNCLEAR). I must say the Japanese are not my favourite people.

Was it people like Bradley and Coglean that inspired you to specialise?

No, I wouldn't say that. I just realised that it's best to specialise in one thing and I thought that'd be worthwhile. I enjoyed my work.

29:30 I took an interest in that, so that's what I did. When I came back, I went to what they call the higher appointments nurses' place in Spring Street, I think it was, saying I was just interested in doing some work, I'd just come back to Melbourne again. They said, "You're just back from

30:00 overseas, you want to go overseas again?" I said I hadn't thought about it. He said he wanted a team to go to Ceylon, Colombo plan work, tuberculosis. I thought, "Good (UNCLEAR)." It's funny how these things turn out, isn't it? So I said, "Count me in, I'll do that."

How long had you been

30:30 **in England and Scotland?**

I had about 2 years and lots of trips around the continent, lovely holiday, which was lovely.

Where did you go on the continent?

Went all over: France and Belgium and Spain and Portugal and Rome, just went everywhere. Another friend of mine had been at school with me, but she was a

31:00 Red Cross girl, she had been over there pre-war with her parents. So she knew exactly what to see and what to do. We were doing that hitchhiking and in the youth hostels. You could do that sort of thing. It was safe then, I wouldn't do it now. It was very safe and it was quite fascinating going to these youth hostels with other

31:30 people's experiences, where they had been to and where they were going next. Get ideas of what was worthwhile seeing. We went everywhere and ended up way up in Scandinavia. Sweden, Denmark, Finland. We had about 10 weeks or

32:00 so. It might be longer, 12. Just going round. It was lovely. It was so safe then. I think these days it isn't safe to do things like that.

With the training in England, were you also being paid

32:30 **a wage?**

Yes. I had. Even then, Ellen and I, we'd see something we'd like to buy and then we'd say, "Shall we buy that or shall we see another country?" We used to say, "See another country." I think it was all very cheap. The youth hostels were very cheap. If you're using other people's transport, that was cheap. Occasionally, some countries we'd have

33:00 public transport, but not often. The whole thing, it was fun. I think we both had a bit of money of our own, but we were very thrifty with it. Although Ellen would say, "Last time," cos she went with her parents, "last time, that was where

33:30 I stayed," in a lovely hotel. Then we were paddling on into the youth hostels and things. She didn't mind. It was fun.

What were the TB wards like in London and Scotland?

Wonderful. They were doing wonderful work there too.

They were

34:00 **discovering new...?**

New drugs, yes. A lot of research work. I enjoyed that. It was so cold in Scotland the first thing I wanted to do was to polish the wards, anything to... they had one of these lazy things, polishers, to, I don't remember what they called it, we had

34:30 never seen anything like that in Australia, to polish the wards. I would get hold of that. They said, "Why do you do that?" I said, "To get warm before I start my work."

Was it a big problem, TB?

Yes. They were doing a lot of surgical work there too.

35:00 It was here when I came back. They were still having the compulsory X-rays. People go to, they had little Flinders Lane, I think they had their officer there where people would come and X-ray. Then they had them going round the country where people would come and be X-rayed.

35:30 Then they were getting all these new migrants coming in. They were supposed to come to the country having been X-rayed before they came. When they arrived in Australia, they were supposed to be X-rayed again. A lot of the X-rays they brought with them was nothing to do with the X-ray we took. It wasn't of them and they were obviously riddled with TB.

- 36:00 They'd bought these X-rays from someone else. I found that a lot. But I think with all that X-raying that they did right through Victoria, or the whole of Australia, I think it helped eradicate it. I think with the Vietnam people
- 36:30 and the boat people, I think it's creeping back again.
- Will me move onto the Colombo plan?**
- Yes.
- What were you told your role would be?**
- They were starting these two model
- 37:00 wards. The base was, it had been the Australian hospital during the wartime, an Australian General Hospital for the military. That had been taken over by a French nursing order and they were running it. Also there was a local person who was a matron. So you had then on top of us there'd be
- 37:30 these seven Australian people who came to run and they said to run two model wards to show them proper bed spacing and that sort of thing, and how people should be looked after, cos everything was crammed together. With the rest of the hospital, they had a bed space
- 38:00 of say, they used to have 60 beds and they had probably 120 patients. At least they got their medications and they'd sit on the veranda during the day and then they'd go on a little straw mat and be under other people's bed at night. Primitive. With our wards they were what they called
- 38:30 model wards where there'd be proper bed spaces, they wouldn't be coughing and spitting around with other people. Just the way people should be looked after. Better hygiene. Most the girls had to have full command of English, the local people. I think they called it the Cambridge Certificate, which was an
- 39:00 English one. Their English was very good. They had a lot of local Ceylonese people and Tamils to train: Indian girls, they were very, very good nurses. We had to train them in how to look after people.
- Were you responsible for drawing up your equipment**
- 39:30 **requirements for the wards?**
- Well, we had what was necessary then, because it was Colombo plan; we were trying to keep the whole of the finance of the country in good shape. With any equipment we wanted, we tried to get it to be made locally so they wouldn't have to be imports, and so they were able
- 40:00 to set up a lot of factories for the washbowls and pans and things like that. It started a lot of local industries: instruments and things like that, so that it wouldn't be a drain on the country when we had left.
- 40:30 So they'd be able to buy everything locally, which was good. We weren't allowed to interfere with their religion at all. They were mainly Buddhists. When it came to full moon, people on complete bed rest, they all hopped out of
- 41:00 bed, went up to the prayer room, sat on the floor and had a wispy bit of material that went round all of them. They chanted prayers and things like that. It made them feel better. Then they went back to have their next month off. They used to have flowers that hadn't fallen from the tree to offer to the temple
- 41:30 and some oil and that sort of thing. Then after they'd got through the full moon, they'd come back and have their complete bed rest. For one day they didn't. They would have felt awful if they hadn't been able to do that. Once there was one little lass who was getting
- 42:00 so ill and

Tape 8

- 00:34 **Go ahead.**
- This little girl was so ill. Then nuns from the French order had been to see her so she had a few rosaries and crosses around her neck. Then she asked the Hindu people, she was a Buddhist, to give her some special oil to put around in little packets around her wrists. She was covered all over with all these tokens and things.
- 01:00 Then her parents said, "Can we bring the Devil Dancers?" I said, "Why not?" They'd start about 10 o'clock at night and the drums and the fire and they were having these huge torches, rushing around with these huge torches up and down their chests and wailing and carrying on. That went on the whole night. We thought, "Well."

- 01:30 All the others were disturbed and everything else. "They can have all their crosses and all the other things if they want," apart from the good drugs we'd given her, we knew she'd die anyway. After that we said, "No, we won't have any Devil Dancers in the ward." It was quite interesting to see. Also, we had an eclipse there too. This was about
- 02:00 10 o'clock in the morning. Total eclipse. All the patients hopped out and got under their bed. They were so scared. Almost as night, they thought it was the end of the world. All the little plants seemed to close up and all the birds were going back to their trees again for about half an hour before we had this total eclipse. Very scary.
- How did the model wards**
- 02:30 **do? Were they successful?**
- Yes. They were teaching the nurses, cos they would go after to different clinics all around the island. They were supposed to run their clinic and wards the way we had shown them to do. No, the training was good.
- Did you visit any of these clinics?**
- Yes, we'd go and make certain they were doing their work
- 03:00 properly. It was such a lovely island. They were well trained and they were good nurses.
- How were you received in these rural areas?**
- No, it was very well. Very gentle people. Lovely people.
- 03:30 (UNCLEAR) the high commissioner, Mr Cutler, Roden Cutler, he's dead. He looked after us very well. He used to make certain we were all right and bring us presents, duty free stuff - it was a very expensive island to live in - and cigarettes, which we smoked those days, and drinks and things, very expensive.
- 04:00 We had two to a bungalow there. We had our own houseboys to look after us. It was a lovely posting. I enjoyed that.
- How long were you there for?**
- About 13-14 months I think, until they were all properly trained.
- 04:30 **Then what did you do?**
- Then I came home and I was asked to go out to Malaya to do the same sort of work. That was most interesting too. That was quite different. We were doing more basic work, I think this next, we were doing a lot of work where
- 05:00 all the people who we had been in contact with, the patients, were seen to, so that TB wasn't spread. This other hospital was trying to treat all the people who were known tuberculosis people. I feel as if we were treating people we knew
- 05:30 had it, but they weren't doing a lot of work trying to help the spread of it.
- What was needed to prevent the spread of it?**
- They had to check up all the other people that didn't have it and treating that to make any contact.
- 06:00 Instead of just treating one person, make certain treating the whole family or any contacts they had. I thought the work we did in Ceylon was very much more worthwhile than the one in Malaya. It was all good work, but I preferred the time in Ceylon. It was all nice and primitive. This was a custom-built hospital and
- 06:30 also the superintendent there was a person who'd been looking after a hospital in England called East Ringstead. I think it was a big local tuberculosis hospital, a mainly private one and rich people there. His whole attitude was so different from the way we worked in Ceylon.
- 07:00 He didn't do enough work with the prevention.
- So in Ceylon you were actually speaking with families and educating them?**
- Yes.
- How would that happen?**
- We went to a lot of the communities.
- 07:30 Also another group of people, a local doctor who was doing this work, it was very much better. More prevention there than they did in Malaya. The other thing was very expensive place. A lot

08:00 of waste of money. I shouldn't talk about that. We did some good work there. I think with the money we had, we should have done better. But we couldn't.

That must have been frustrating for you?

Nan Holloway, and there was three of us had been in Ceylon, we just think that it was, the whole attitude was that you could do

08:30 so much more. I just didn't like the, it was a beautiful brand new hospital that Lady Templer had collected money for. I didn't think we were doing enough for prevention of tuberculosis. We could have done more.

09:00 Do you mean having the funding to be able to go and educate communities?

Yes. It was just more or less run by the superintendent person. A person who had tuberculosis would be treated, but not enough work for other people who had,

09:30 just sort of prevention. I'm sure some of the work was good, but the other one was better.

You had an awful incident there at the hospital?

With my friend Nan Holloway, yes. She was on night duty and she was looking after a person who had been operated on that

10:00 day. She was just checking on her blood transfusion and a patient stalked her from one ward to the other when she was doing her rounds and hopped over the wall and stabbed her, mainly because he was cross because she had moved his bed from the inside ward into the balcony, so he was

10:30 mentally a bit unhinged. So they had to phone me in my house and I had to go up to see her. This man was still there with his knife, the nurses not knowing what to do and Nan on the floor full of blood, and the watchman, who was still standing there not doing much about

11:00 helping at all. So I just went and said, "Can I have that?" and took the knife and locked him up in the linen cupboard and got the watchman to make certain he was all right. Then we got Nan up and got her into bed and got the medical superintendent there was a surgeon, the other one was away, to examine her. There was one stab here, one here, one there. It was horrid.

11:30 Fortunately I had some scissors there. I had to cut her uniform off, see what it was all about. Then we had to X-ray her in case it had done any damage internally, which it had. It collapsed one lung. So then they had to get all the equipment. It was a surgical ward so we had all the equipment there. So we were able to sort that out and make her better.

12:00 It was a nasty experience. Then the prime minister there and the minister of foreign affairs there were saying, "Is this an international incident? Is it Australia versus Malaya?" that sort of stuff. I said, "Not at all. It was just the work of one very sick man."

12:30 It could have happened in any hospital anywhere around the world. So poor old, he had to go to jail because of this, so they had a hospital in the jail. The whole thing was very, very sad. Then all the people were sending flowers to her. We had all the politicians coming in to visit her, like the

13:00 passing parade. When the patients had their one-hour walking about, they'd all come on passing parade, coming to see if she was all right. It was quite a business.

Did she stay on at the hospital?

Yes, she did. After a fortnight, and she was in my ward then, I was looking after her. Then I asked for a week off and I took her up

13:30 to Penang. We had a week up there. Then she went back on duty. Then after that, she went and worked in Borneo doing the same work. After that she went up and worked in New Guinea. Then she retired back to her parents' farm in Goulburn. Gutsy person. During the war, she'd been up in the

14:00 Solomon Islands doing the frontline theatre work there. She was a very... What do we talk about now?

How long was your time in Malaya?

I think it was about 15 months, something like that. The thing was that we trained the girls up. We had local people working along with us. They were all doing

14:30 this Brompton Hospital exam at the end so they were all properly qualified at the end. We'd have to do these exams there.

You conducted the exams over there?

Yes, and the surgeon, had extra lectures and things. There were some very, very good

15:00 nurses.

How old were you by then?

I was then about 38. Then I went back to Australia, and then I married and I went to Singapore and lived there from 1960-64.

Tell me about meeting your husband.

15:30 I met him in Ceylon. A mutual friend had asked, Nan Holloway, the same who was stabbed, she was a great friend of mine. We had this bungalow together at Ceylon. This other friend was coming to have dinner and said would we mind if he brought a friend of his to have dinner too. That was all right and that was the person I eventually married.

16:00 We just got in touch with each other. Then he was back in England, I was back in Australia. Lots of letters backwards and forwards then eventually we married.

You met up again in Australia?

No, when I was moved to Malaya, he was down in Singapore. I used to come down to Singapore

16:30 and he'd come up to Malaya. We'd see each other. We had a very happy time in Singapore. It's a lovely place to live in.

Where did you marry?

In Singapore.

17:00 **Did you continue to work?**

No, I didn't. I used to go to voluntary work at the Group-Captain Cheshire Home, which was just down the road from where we lived. That was one that Group-Captain Cheshire; he had his homes all around the world. He was one of the people who had dropped the atom bomb. He'd started

17:30 these homes all around the world. The matron there was a person who had been locked up in Changi. She and her husband had been living in Singapore for many, many years, then they were both locked up in Changi. He died, but she wanted to stay on. Then someone knew that she originally had been trained at the London Hospital and asked if

18:00 she'd be the honorary matron of the Cheshire Home. Extraordinary person. So she looked after that. She was a charming person. So I would often wander up there to give her a hand. That was just voluntary work.

What work was your husband doing in Singapore?

He was doing Defence lands there. When

18:30 they got their independence, they had to work out what belonged to Singapore and what belonged to Britain. In the early days, there weren't any title deeds or anything like that. The Raffles [Sir Stamford Raffles family] would just decide to build something here or something there. No title deeds; a lot of sorting out. He was there for 7 years sorting that out.

19:00 He'd also do work up in Gan [?] and Hong Kong and anywhere they had Crown lands or Defence lands, he'd sort those out.

What did he do prior to that work?

Well, he had a career. Early on, he was farming. Then, in the war, he had always been a territorial and

19:30 he was called up with the Royal Hampshire Regiment. Then he was at the war early on from 39 right through 49, then he was asked to do this work. Before the war, he was with the Airfield Board trying to find suitable sites for aerodromes or

20:00 airfields during the 'phoney war', knowing that the war was on its way. They had to find about 300 suitable airfields for them, or sites, for them. Then the war came and so he was called up immediately. So he had from 39 up to 49. Then he was asked to do his defence lands work.

He

20:30 **was in the air force?**

No, he wasn't. Nothing to do with the air force. It was just Defence. No, he was with the Royal Hampshire Regiment during the war. The other one was quite different. Just Defence lands, wherever they had Defence lands they looked after that.

21:00 When they had their independence in Ceylon and also in Singapore, they had to sort out what belonged to England and what belonged to the local people. Britain was very generous. They gave most of the stuff straightaway without any pain.

21:30 **What would that entail?**

They would have to sort out from London and if or not would be up to the British people in Downing Street. They were trading, "We'll have this, we'll have that," and the other person would decide what Britain would still hold and what; it was his work, not

22:00 mine, so I don't really know so much about it. I think they hold a lot of those still.

Did you enjoy living in Singapore?

I loved it.

Why?

The climate and the gentle way of life and it was just lovely people. I just loved Singapore. I loved Ceylon too.

22:30 A nice, gentle way of life. We didn't rush too much. Good friends, good neighbours. It was lovely.

What was your social circle like in Singapore?

The other British wives there. There was an officers' club there

23:00 and we could go swimming, there was a golf club we could play golf. You ran your own home, ordering food and that sort of thing. You had an amah [maid] to do your work for you, but you still ran your own home. I still had my garden there. We were right by the sea, by the Straits of Malacca.

23:30 Also you were there to see your husband off to work and there to welcome him back. You just lead a fairly normal life in a different country. You still have to eat and plan your meals, plan your house.

24:00 I think it was good. We'd entertain other people. It was just a very casual, lovely way of living. Phil had 7 years there and I had 4 years there. He never took any leave, so we had about six months where he could have done

24:30 nothing at all when we got back. But then they asked him if he'd go to Bahrain because no one wanted to go there, the climate's so awful. He would never refuse a posting. So instead of having a lovely six months leave, we had about two months and then we went off to Bahrain. He was overage to go there anyway, but no one else would go.

25:00 Then we were supposed to be over there for...he said he'd only go provided his wife could go with him. Generally the men had to go first and then the wives would follow later. He said he'd only go if I could go straight there with him, which I did. We only should have been 18 months posted. We ended up with 2½ years because they couldn't get

25:30 anyone else to go. So it was a dump of a place really. There wasn't anywhere to go. There was the airport restaurant, there was a Markham Club, which was run by service people, there was a Gymkhana Club where they had a tennis court and a swimming pool and that's the lot. So

26:00 we'd entertain each other who were in the different houses. It was hot. All the houses were air-conditioned and your car was air-conditioned. It was very, very hot. If you went out of your houses, it was like a wet blanket being thrown over you. Very, very hot.

26:30 **Did you have much to do with the local people?**

Not if you could help it, no. Arrogant people. No, I didn't. Very arrogant people. They thought nothing of the women at all. My next-door neighbour was a diplomat. She had to entertain some of the wives there.

27:00 Sometimes I'd go in next-door there to morning tea with them. They'd arrive in their black cars with their black abas all over them. Then they'd be dressed in the most gorgeous French models and things. It was a different way of life. Then unfortunately

27:30 the Americans had an oil well there, Alwali, and it was run by the Americans. The Americans came to work out a time and motion study, then they made a lot of the people redundant and they took umbrage about this. So this awful

28:00 Saturday morning they went on the rampage and tried to have a go at the Americans. They'd taken their jobs away. To them anyone who was white was American. So this Saturday morning, Philip had to work this Saturday and he was coming back and there was one lot of traffic lights there. They caught him there, stopped him. They

28:30 had these bricks wrapped up in material and soaked in petrol and having thrown that in his car, broke all the windows in the car backwards and forwards about 6 times. The car was a complete write off. He came all cuts and bruises. It was dreadful.

29:00 The other people they got was my next-door neighbour, Joan Cartwright, who was a diplomat's wife. The other person they caught was a wing commander's wife, Mary Canopy [?]. Those two, in fact they're all dead, they're all dead now. The three of them were never well after that.

- 29:30 The stress, it upset them. The other two had thyroid trouble after that. Later on, Philip got this wretched Parkinson's. It was never the same after that. On the Monday, he thought he'd better go back to work again. He got in the bath and I tried to get all the glass and stuff, a taxi
- 30:00 driver had brought him home, all his cuts and things. He said, "I'll go back to work on Monday," which he did, and the riots broke out again. There were some Arabs in the next office. They said, "Mr Taylor, the riots are here, we'll bring you home." So on the Monday, these Arabs
- 30:30 brought him back. They put him in the back of their car with one of these hair dresses. I've got it there. So it disguised him as an Arab. They brought him home again. So it was a lovely place to live in. The next thing that happened was they had the Six Day War where the Arabs against the Israelis.
- 31:00 Then they thought that if the British had sided against the Israelis, I can't remember what it was all about, we'd have to leave. We all packed up ready to leave. Then it all finished very quickly so we could unpack again. It was exciting. I had lovely neighbours,
- 31:30 good friends. The actual place was a dump of a place. Just desert.

You managed to stay there 2 1/2 years?

Yes.

How did you keep your morale up? Did it affect your marriage?

Oh no, nothing that upset our marriage. It was a good marriage.

- 32:00 Oh, heavens no. No. I ran my house, I had a nice houseboy to do the cooking and all, not the cooking, I did the cooking. In fact, it was hard to get servants in Bahrain. He did all the heavy work, washing and that sort of thing. You just ran your house and you could
- 32:30 go to the Gymkhana Club and have a swim or you could, I had lovely neighbours there. Lovely square houses with the flat top on the house. You put all your clothes on the top of your house and stairs to go up to the roof. It was a funny old place.

You must have needed

- 33:00 **extra security after the attacks?**

No.

Were you concerned about your safety?

No, not really. It was just that these local people, the Americans had made them redundant and they wanted to have a go at someone. Unfortunately, they didn't catch the Americans, they hit my husband and these other two English girls.

- 33:30 None of them were well after that. I saw these girls, and my husband; all Joan's trouble started with that wretched trouble in Bahrain: upset her thyroid and they could never put it right again.

You weren't really doing any nursing work?

No, I never

- 34:00 did any nursing.

Did you miss it?

I was looking after my husband. When you've worked in nursing for 20 years, it's good to have a break, isn't it? Pursue other things. It was nice to have a rest.

- 34:30 I have never been idle. I always had something to do. Very keen on handwork and embroidery and that sort of stuff. You always can find yourself. After that, we had this lovely retirement. We had lots of fun going round England. Phil (UNCLEAR)

- 35:00 It must have been 100 miles from London. He spent a lot of time in Norfolk as a boy so we started there and I found this lovely place called 'Castleacre'. It was a lovely old place, about 350 years old, with a lot of land. We kept ourselves busy making a lovely garden and enjoying life, again with good neighbours.

- 35:30 It's all your neighbours, I always had lovely neighbours. We're very happy.

You've spent the day reflecting on your life.

I feel so boring.

Not at all.

Life's never been dull. It's never been dull. I've enjoyed my life. Some bits were better than others, but

- 36:00 I think mainly some people are born happy and some people aren't. If you're born happy, you can come with anything through life. You can. I enjoyed my time living in Norfolk. Of course, I'm back here. It is very different living in a
- 36:30 suburban jungle, but I do a lot of work with the service people. I enjoy that. I love marching in my own city on Anzac Day. I love doing that. I always sell the poppies and the Anzac tokens. I kept myself busy with ex-service people.

Are there many of the RAAF nurses

- 37:00 **still around?**

No. There are quite a lot of them, but I think the thing is they're all getting older. We have a lunch once a year, but this year we only had about 20 people there. They're too old to travel. They don't all come from Victoria; they're all spread out the whole of Australia.

- 37:30 We still try to have an annual lunch, but it's getting smaller and smaller and smaller. More funerals to go to. We try to keep in touch with the ones who are still going.

What is the work you are doing with the associations?

Mainly

- 38:00 welfare work and visiting the people who are ill. With the Florence Nightingale Trust, I love this work; it's wonderful. It was started in the 40s when the World War II started. They got lots of money for this. It's quite a social thing to belong to, I think, to be on the committee there. They collected a lot of money to look after the nurses after
- 38:30 the war. It's very well endowed. So anyone who worked in the services, army, navy or air force, or Red Cross too I think, if they need any help they can apply for money or they might want a new washing machine or something like that. We look after them. Welfare work. And we visit them. We have
- 39:00 one meeting for the people who are investigating people and who are visiting people. Then the other one from the chairman who was an accountant and a solicitor who will make certain the money is being well spent. They find out what money we need to give these people and I say a lot of the girls who have been in the army, navy or air force, when they came
- 39:30 back, a lot of them were matrons of these big hospitals: [Royal] Women's Hospital, [Royal] Melbourne Hospital, Eye and Ear Hospital. Then there wasn't superannuation or pensions and things. After they were busy matrons of these big hospitals, they just say, "Thank you very much," and nothing to fall back on. No money except if they had been able to save up a little bit. So then a lot of them
- 40:00 are just on this basic state pension and we can help them with a bit extra. We have so many where we give them money at Christmas time or else if they need more grants for (UNCLEAR) worthwhile grants. So that is worthwhile. So I keep myself busy.

Were there

- 40:30 **many women you know that went on to lead a similar life, dedicated to nursing and their careers after the war?**

Yes, a lot of these ones came back were matrons of these big hospitals. Betty Lawson, who was in charge of the Women's Hospital, most highly decorated nurse of the whole

- 41:00 of the war. She's living in a place called (UNCLEAR) Court down here. She has pursued her nursing. A lot of them pursued their nursing after. Most of them did except if they married. Another one, the matron of the Eye and Ear Hospital, or others just nursing in

- 41:30 other ways.

What was their attitude to marriage in your group of friends at that time?

If they found someone they loved, they married. If you married, you had to get out of the service immediately. You weren't allowed to marry and stay in. No, they were all for it. There were so many disasters with being killed and

- 42:00 death and disasters.

INTERVIEW ENDS